

# **FOOTBALL**

for all

**A baseline study**

**In association with**



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**Contents**

<b>1. Preface</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Campaign activities</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6. The questionnaires</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6.1 The data</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6.2 Respondents' comments</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>7. The interviews</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7.1 General view</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7.2 Examples of good practice</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>7.3 Failures and lessons to be learned</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>7.4 Responsibilities of government</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>7.5 Responsibilities of clubs</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>7.6 Role of supporters</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>7.7 Role of players</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>7.8 Responsibilities of IFA</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>7.9 Other potential champions</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>7.10 Media coverage of the sport</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>7.11 The new stadium</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>7.12 Wider connections</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>7.12 Future for campaign</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>7.13 Structure of campaign</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>7.14 Funding of campaign</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>8. The fans</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>8.1 Background</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>8.2 Roles of the fans</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>8.3 The future</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>9. Conclusions</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>10. Summary of recommendations</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix A: questionnaire</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Recipients of Football for All campaign questionnaire</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Questionnaire 'scores' in detail</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Appendix B: interviews</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Interview guide</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Author cv</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Democratic Dialogue</b>	<b>69</b>

## 1. Preface

This paper was commissioned by the Irish Football Association, to provide a ‘baseline survey’ of the impact of its Football for All campaign, initiated in February 2000. The campaign was stimulated by some deplorably sectarian episodes at Northern Ireland international games but an important message of this research, while not in any way wishing to diminish the continuing challenge of sectarianism in the game, is the breadth and inclusiveness of the Football for All campaign—and thus its positive potential to assist all involved to lift the sport in Northern Ireland beyond its current, and recurrent, crises. These were evidenced at time of writing by the sword of Damocles hanging over Coleraine FC, following the collapse of Omagh Town.

The research was conducted using a combination of a questionnaire survey, interviews with figures at all levels of the game and focus groups. It aims to inform the work of the campaign as it goes forward, making a number of recommendations in this regard, and provide a basis for further monitoring of its impact in the years ahead. It may perhaps be hoped that the first home victory over England in three quarters of a century will provide a springboard for further progress.

I would very much wish to acknowledge the generosity of all who contributed to this research, particularly as interviewees or members of focus groups. Secretarial staff at the IFA and DD kindly distributed the questionnaire, Jim Rainey and Gerard Lawlor gave of their time in organising the focus groups, and all officials at the IFA, particularly the community relations officer, Michael Boyd, offered every assistance, which was greatly appreciated. The views expressed here are, of course, the responsibility of the author alone.

**Robin Wilson**  
**December 2005**

## 2. Executive summary

Football has no intrinsic values: it can be a force for conflict as well as co-operation. Launched in 2000, the Football for All campaign was stimulated by deplorable sectarian incidents at Windsor Park during Northern Ireland internationals. But it has developed into a broader, positive campaign to enhance engagement with the sport, as supporters and players, by members of a range of historically under-represented social groups.

The campaign has engaged in a wide variety of activities. These can be categorised in terms of **information, activation and development**, though these should be seen as mutually reinforcing.

In terms of information, introduction of community-relations and disability-awareness modules into coach training has been a major innovation, but these can be seen as *outputs* rather than *outcomes* of the campaign. Assessing the latter is inherently difficult but journalists and editors, as well as interested onlookers, provide a good independent gauge. They were remarkably positive in interviews about the campaign—particularly the work of the community-relations officer, who leads on the information dimension.

The impact of development work is easier to measure. Remarkable rates of growth of participation can be counted in women's football and football for people with disabilities in recent years. These have been so rapid that it would be implausible to claim they were simply the produce of spontaneous social trends.

These are obvious aspects of any campaign to assess. But the most fascinating aspect of this research is in terms of the dramatic impact of the campaign in the area of activation.

Against the background of the highly disturbing data collected for government by Pricewaterhouse Coopers on the heaving skewing of Northern Ireland and Irish League support by religion and gender, an intriguing facet of Football for All which emerged in the interviews has been the engagement of fans, initially at Northern Ireland level, in its 'co-production'. This has allowed it to present an otherwise very challenging message in a non-threatening manner and to activate fans to engage in 'self-policing' and embrace ownership of the campaign. This is hugely positive and as an approach can be cascaded down to Irish League level.

This 'co-production' of the Football for All campaign by fans has represented a major innovation in community-relations practice in Northern Ireland, which has wide implications for how the goal of a normal, civic society identified in the *A Shared Future* policy framework on community relations can best be pursued. In particular, it highlights how the expertise of voluntary associations, and the idealism of voluntary effort, can realise achievements that government alone can not.

This assessment of the impact of the Football for All campaign used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, combining a questionnaire survey, interviews with figures associated with the game at all levels and focus groups of fans.

The questionnaire response was disappointing but nevertheless illuminating, as clear patterns emerged. Respondents affirmed the success of Football for All in transforming the atmosphere at international games, but they did not detect similar change at the level of the Irish League. They also strongly endorsed a range of suggested activities as to the future of the campaign, suggesting a groundswell of goodwill, while warning that this would be a long-term challenge.

In the interviews, there was powerful recognition of the change at Windsor Park as the biggest single sign of the effectiveness of the campaign. This was reflected not only in the creation of a more 'carnival' atmosphere but also in the capacity to sell out the ground, which could clearly not be put down—until, that is, the extraordinary night of September 7th 2005—to improving performances on the pitch. But there was also evidence of good practice *vis-à-vis* small, street-level projects.

The new stadium envisaged at the Maze was widely seen as a valuable initiative for the campaign (though not everyone agreed that it should be outside Belfast). If multi-code, it could send out an important integrative message. It was also seen as a means to raise the standard expected of stadium facilities and to widen audiences for Northern Ireland internationals—particularly among women and people with disabilities—if that standard was high. The question rose as to whether a fully neutral venue required the replacement of *God Save the Queen* by a more broadly acceptable alternative at matches, with most respondents taking a relaxed view of such a change.

Criticism of the IFA, sometimes robust, did however emerge, which highlighted how critical Football for All is to the modernisation of the association. A generally negative image came across in several interviews and there was particular criticism of how the ban on Sunday games countermanded the Football for All message of inclusion.

Government also came under criticism in the interviews, in terms of its commitment to tackling intolerance in the sport. A comparative look at the Scottish Executive's anti-sectarian efforts casts the Northern Ireland administration in a poor light.

Ministers could and should replicate the efforts of their Scottish counterparts. Legislation needs updating to ensure supporter misbehaviour can be more effectively dealt with.

It was strongly argued that the next step for the campaign was to make a more systematic impact on Irish League clubs. The merger between the IFA and the Irish Premier League was seen as making this possible, and a vehicle was offered by the licensing system which the IPL is developing to lever change—particularly with regard to improved stewarding and facilities—which would promote access by all. Each club should designate a Football for All co-ordinator.

While financial constraints were acknowledged in these regards, it was felt that a community orientation on the part of clubs offered a route to long-term viability. There were also radical suggestions, for ground-sharing for example, which could have a conciliatory potential, and the Setanta Cup was widely welcomed as a north-south initiative.

The potential of the 16 new Football Development Centres was also widely recognised. These were identified as offering major opportunities to widen participation in the sport by oncoming cohorts of young people. The data that will have to be compiled and submitted to the IFA by the grassroots development officers, if properly collected, will help meet the concern of government about poor data collection by the association as to how many people participate in the sport in different ways, and who they are. The IFA should engage in early dialogue with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to sort this issue out.

There was further widespread agreement that the campaign had a future—indeed that it should be further developed. Paradoxically, the more it raises consciousness about the limits to the inclusiveness of football, the more it identifies that which needs to be done. This related to another shared belief: that Football for All needed to be, and to be seen to be, integral to everything the IFA does. Indeed, there was a recurrent connection in the minds of interviewees between the success of the campaign and the broader ‘modernisation’ of the IFA.

This has implications for where the campaign sits within the organisation. It should operate as a discrete and, as resources allow, expanding unit of the association, reporting directly to the chief executive, rather than coming under one or other existing department. The broader advisory panel running the campaign should be chaired by the IFA chair or chief executive, and the participation of external stakeholders enhanced.

Funding for the campaign has hitherto been dependent on support from the EU ‘Peace II’ programme and UEFA. If Football for All is indeed to be integral to the future role of the association, interviewees identified the need for it to receive core, rather than project, funding. A proportion of the money from the soccer strategy should be allocated to this purpose. Examining funding is also a way to make priorities clear: following the FIFA recommendation of ensuring at least 10 per cent of associations’ budgets was allocated to women’s football specifically would ensure it was taken seriously.

There is scope for clarifying the aim of Football for All, looking to the future. One simple way of articulating this aim is: an environment in which every individual can feel *free* to become involved in the sport, on a basis of *equality*, and confident they will be *secure* if they do so. This can be translated into consequent objectives, to which projects or activities capable of measurement or qualitative evaluation can be attached. These will all add up to a cogent and persuasive strategy—the elements of which are already largely available in existing documentation—which the IFA should work up and to which its executive committee should be clearly and publicly committed.

But government also has a major role here. Not only because of the campaign’s potential to secure public goods in terms of football but also because of the lessons it is generating for good practice elsewhere, government needs to put its shoulder behind this campaign. That commitment will itself be measurable—in political and financial terms.

### 3. Introduction

In a divided society, sport in general, and football in particular, has great capacity to reinforce ‘ethnic’ tensions. Whether it be Linfield FC v Cliftonville FC or Red Star Belgrade v Dynamo Zagreb, football allegiances and the associated symbolism and paraphernalia have offered a rich source of the markers of division, spilling over into intercommunal violence. Supporters, more likely to be young, working-class and male than the general population, also reflect the demography of those most likely to engage in riots or to be active in organisations of a paramilitary-type. Aggression and violence invest both football and intercommunal strife with high-octane emotions.

As Murphy *et al* (1990: 9) point out,

More particularly, intense conflict in connection with a football match is more likely when and where: (1) the teams represent groups that are in some kind of serious conflict with each other in the wider society; (2) the rival supporters are strongly committed to victory for their sides, but where this commitment is not tempered by a ‘fair play’ ethic based on a notion of sport as playful and friendly competition rather than serious rivalry; and (3) where the groups involved, measured on what might call a ‘localism-cosmopolitanism’ scale, stand towards the ‘localism’ end of the continuum and hence have a learned difficulty in tolerating ‘difference’ or ‘strangeness’. Such ‘localistic’ groups represent the general human tendency toward ‘we-group’ inclusion and ‘they-group’ exclusion in a particularly stark and extreme form.

The story of football in Northern Ireland is a story of such tensions. As Sugden (1995: 208) argues, ‘Indeed, if there is one single sport which does most to emphasise the polarity of Northern Irish society it is association football.’ The split between the Irish Football Association and the Football Association of Ireland, though long delayed after partition and with fault on both sides, was one obvious manifestation. The fate of Belfast Celtic, the departure of Derry City to the Eircom League and the resignation of Neil Lennon from the Northern Ireland team were among many others.

Yet football also has great potential to play a progressive role in healing division. Sugden (1995: 209) goes on to say that ‘in other important ways the sport achieves far more than either Gaelic games or rugby union in terms of providing common ground for Catholics and Protestants’. And, more generally (Sugden, 1995: 213), ‘sport is an extremely malleable social medium which can be engineered in the service of social justice’, just as easily as it can ‘be exploited in the service of social conflict’.

It engages with popular culture in a way that the activity of political elites often passes above. It can offer positive alternatives to just those most at risk of falling into the hands of paramilitaries. It can give messages of peace and reconciliation a concrete form. And if such messages are sent by public figures who act as role models—as successful footballers, whether they like it or not, are increasingly asked to be—they may carry particular weight and influence.

Northern Ireland’s 1982 World Cup performance and the wide public support it enjoyed was an example of this positive potential, as was the recent Linfield v Derry City game (leaving aside the incidents afterwards) and the arrangement between Linfield and a west Belfast camogie club for floodlit training. The north-south Setanta Cup is another pointer towards progress—and so is the Football for All campaign.

On the horizon is the possibility of a spanking new stadium on the Maze site, which will be multi-code and hopefully will engage the GAA, particularly after the recent decision by the association to remove the ban on ‘foreign’ games. This could give a major fillip to the IFA’s campaign, with the possibility of a fresh start at a new ground, without any historical baggage to divest.

The positive nature of the Football for All campaign allows it to go beyond an anti-sectarian message. Not only does this mean racism—a rising concern in Northern Ireland generally—has been included under its umbrella, but also wider questions of inclusion and recognition, notably of women’s football and involvement in the game of people with disabilities, have been taken on board.

#### 4. Methodology

The IFA tender set out in five bullet points the areas the research was required to secure. The approach adopted, respectively, was as follows:-

- undertake research and identify the impact of the IFA's Football For All Project on promoting Good Relations:

A questionnaire (see appendix A) was developed in consultation with the IFA community relations officer and distributed by the association and DD. It was sent to clubs and supporters' clubs, coaches, referees and players. It asked respondents to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign so far, what impact they detected it to have had, what involvement (if any) they had had, and to what effect, and what improvements they might recommend in the light of experience.

- audit current practice, categorising all activity in terms of its purpose, aims and objectives:

The research digested all material made available from the IFA community relations officer's files on activity associated with the campaign. Additional material was gleaned from the questionnaires, the interviews and the focus groups.

- carry out informal and formal consultations, discussions, interviews as required to gather relevant information, both quantitative and qualitative:

Interviews were secured, 27 in all, with figures associated with the game at all levels, to tease out the issues in more detail, including media editors and a government official. To avoid potential bias in favour of the campaign arising from the large number of interviews with IFA staff, more distant perspectives were obtained, including from Derry City FC, the FAI and the Scottish Executive. The interviews were semi-structured—that is to say, they loosely followed a topic guide while being tailored to the individual. The interview list and the topic guide were also developed in conjunction with the IFA community relations officer (appendix B).

Two focus groups of fans were also organised: one was drawn from the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters Clubs, which has been a key partner in the Football for All campaign; the other from supporters of Cliftonville FC, from whose fans again a more critical view was anticipated. Participants were invited to reflect, in this more interactive context, on what effect, if any, they think the campaign may have had on themselves, on other fans, on potential supporters and on the image of the association.

- report on the progress of the Survey to the IFA's Community Relations Officer and, on completion, to the IFA Football For All Advisory Panel:

The researcher liaised with the community relations officer throughout, generating a draft report to him for comment before circulation to the advisory panel, to whom a presentation was subsequently made.

- provide a final report on the Survey in an agreed format, including an Executive Summary, with an assessment of the extent (quantitative) and value (qualitative) of current approaches and provide recommendations for future work in this area

This paper is the result of the work on the project. It includes not only the assessment of the Football for All campaign to date but also recommendations as to its future. It is written with a view to being published to stimulate further debate—perhaps via a seminar which brings together many of the interviewees and other interested individuals—and thereby contribute itself constructively to the future of Football for All.

## 5. Campaign activities

The Football for All campaign tends to be associated in the public mind with tackling sectarian manifestations around internationals at Windsor Park, and this has indeed played a key role and had the most measurable impact of the campaign. But, as the IFA community relations officer, Michael Boyd, has stressed, 'The project is not simply an anti-sectarian programme, but is very pro-active in challenging racism, [and] supporting the promotion of women's football and disability football.'

This is true, but it remains the case that the campaign has—quite defensibly—invested more of finite resources at the international level than at the level of the Irish League. This can also be explained by the historic separation between the IFA and the IFL, which has recently been addressed. But it is clear that work with clubs remains less developed.

Mr Boyd (2005) has divided campaign activities into three categories: education, support and communication. Take the last of these first: communication. This has included a high level of activity by the CR officer in generating press releases and cultivating media contacts, as well as innovative use of campaign DVDs and the fashionable Football for All wristbands. Perusal of files of releases and press clippings shows a high rate of success in 'planting' stories in the local media (and, indeed, positive reviews in UEFA's electronic news). This was strongly borne out in interviews with journalists, who were very complimentary about the output of the Football for All campaign (see section 7).

The profile of work in tackling sectarianism, and to a lesser extent racism, has been higher than the work in support of women's football and football for people with disabilities. This reflects positively on the energy of Mr Boyd in generating his own press releases, rather than negatively on the women's or disability officers. But it does imply that the campaign message needs to be more broadly transmitted, with the assistance of the marketing/communications department, rather than this being dependent entirely on the community relations officer.

The media are, however, not the only means of communication and face-to-face networks are important vehicles to spread the message in ways which sometimes carry greater legitimacy. Mr Boyd has suggested that these take in the Community Relations Council, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, clubs and supporters. The statutory bodies are engaged via the Football for All advisory panel, but some interviewees suggested the panel was too weighted towards IFA officers.

This overlaps with the area of support. The engagement of organised Northern Ireland supporters, as the interviews and focus groups demonstrate, has been an absolutely key aspect of the campaign and its most successful innovation. This can be demonstrated in straightforward, 'bums on seats' terms, with the remarkable growth in the number of Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs and the now-regular filling of Windsor Park for internationals, a phenomenon which can certainly not be put down—until, that is, the extraordinary night of September 7th 2005—to higher-quality performances on the field of play.

The focus of the campaign to date has meant that much more work has been done with the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs than with Irish League supporters, and work with club supporters is a logical next step, accepting they may not always be so formally organised. Work with the clubs as such is also however key, as is explored in some depth in the interview with the Irish Premier League secretary.

The community-relations officer has identified a large number of individual organisations with which the campaign is in contact. Interviews with representatives of Dungoyne Boys FC and the Chinese Football Association were arranged to assess the effect of such grassroots contacts, which have proved both effective and appreciated. But football development centres are mentioned in this regard and this remains a key challenge in developmental terms on the ground, with the centres about to come on stream.

Perhaps better placed under education, the campaign has been engaged in developing a sport-and-diversity strand in the citizenship-education programme progressively rolling out across Northern Ireland post-primary schools. This is a very good example of how the relatively small cog which is the Football for All campaign can drive a much larger wheel and reach out to a wide audience. There will be a strong case for continued liaison with the Council on the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in the coming years to ensure this material is prominently incorporated and updated.

A major achievement in this area has been the inclusion of community-relations and disability modules into coach training—the former has been delivered to 600 coaches in the year to March 2005, according to Mr Boyd. This is a substantial reach: there are 900 licensed coaches on the IFA's books. Billy Robinson of Counteract has been brought in to talk to coaches training for the Pro-licence and the anti-racism trainer David White has been engaged to talk to potential A-licence coaches (and IFA staff). Coaches and referees are a key group in terms of purveying the Football for All message and this investment is very positive.

Integrating Football for All into day-to-day IFA activities, as in the training of coaches and referees, is a good way of ensuring that the message is not seen as peripheral or of marginal importance. The need to embed it into every aspect of what the IFA does is a key conclusion arising from this research.



In this sense, a better way to think of what Football for All is doing is in terms of **information, activation** and **development**. Information is spreading the message out from the IFA, activation is encouraging others to do so in their own contexts and development is expanding the constituency of those engaged with and participating in the sport from the target groups. It is important, however, to stress (and this has organisational implications) that there is a synergy between all three and the campaign should be seen in an holistic fashion, rather than simply one event or press release after another.

The work of the women's and disability officers highlights this developmental aspect of the campaign. The former, Sara Booth, can point to the fact that there are now 1,051 14+ female players, organised in 39 clubs, recognised by the Northern Ireland Women's Football Association, as against some 700 players, and 30 clubs, at the time of the Advisory Panel (2001) report—a growth rate in participation of 50 per cent in just a few years. This is addition to the establishment of the senior international team.

The strategy developed by the latter, Alan Crooks (2005), sets out five clear aims:

- to raise the profile and awareness of disability football,
- to increase the number of disabled performers,
- to improve the quality of training available to them,
- to establish and develop new and existing competitions, and
- to continue to develop performance pathways and opportunities for elite performers.

What in practice this has involved is working through special schools/centres and disability organisations to target people with disabilities. A Coaching Disabled Footballers award has been developed (some 150 people have received it) and there is a three-hour module on disability in the UEFA B licence course. The work has broadened out beyond the initial focus on learning disabilities to include other disabilities, physical or otherwise, and has engaged partners in Disability Sport Northern Ireland and Special Olympics Ulster.

An index of the speed of growth is that the Community Cup for adults with a disability has grown from eight to 14 to 19 teams over the last three years. As with the growth of women's football, it is intuitively implausible to put down such rapid development simply to spontaneous social trends.

Indeed, Mr Crooks points out how he is overstretched by this and he is now to have a development-officer assistant. The latter will provide a valuable link to the grassroots development officers. He contrasts his effort in trying to address the diversity of disabilities single-handedly with the specialist organisations the FAI can draw on, each covering individual disability types (Blind Sports Ireland, for instance), to support this work.

Unlike much of the work undertaken to date by the community relations officer—except in terms of the broadening of support for the international team and the training of coaches—this developmental work is readily translated into performance indicators. It is easy to count numbers of participants in a programme, whereas assessing the attitudinal effect of an article arising from a Football for All press release is impossible.

It would be wrong to sacrifice information (and activation) in favour of development, on the dubious premiss that what gets counted counts, and largely qualitative research (such as this) will remain necessary to give a rounded evaluation of the campaign. But, particularly with an eye to the emerging football development centres and the desirability of continuing to broaden Football for All beyond its original anti-sectarian motivation, a greater emphasis on the developmental aspect of the campaign is a logical next step.

The following sections of this report seek further to evaluate the Football for All campaign's effectiveness to date. But it is worth entering an immediate rider: when asked in the mid-1930s about the significance of the French revolution of 1789, the Chinese revolutionary Zhou Enlai famously responded that it was early to say. Attitudinal change is a long-term project and it is no excuse for complacency to echo the comment made by one of the interviewees for this project. John Gilmour of the Scottish Executive, asked how he would assess its efforts to tackle sectarianism in sport, said it was 'early days yet'.

## 6. The questionnaires

### 6.1 The data

The questionnaire was sent out with a letter on IFA notepaper to 1580 individuals altogether, of which the largest single group was the 900 licensed coaches, followed by 250 referees and the same number of premiership players. Sixty-four were returned: 16 coaches, 9 referees, 5 players, 8 supporters and 26 respondents who fell into more than one category or none.

This was, quantitatively, a poor response, much lower than that to the questionnaire issued by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (2001), asking questions in relation to the development of the soccer strategy. This could be because the Football for All campaign has yet to be seen as core to the future of the sport in Northern Ireland—despite the very considerable praise to which it was subject during this research—or because potential respondents did not attach sufficient credibility either to the author or to the IFA.

Nevertheless, clear patterns did emerge from the questionnaire responses, and many individuals volunteered thoughtful additional comments.

Most respondents had been drawn into the Football for All campaign in some way (question 2). Almost half (30) had attended a workshop or training session which had included material about the campaign. The inclusion of a 'slot' in the UEFA-B coaching licence has clearly been instrumental in this regard. Nearly a third (19) had taken part in a campaign event or game, and a third (21) had discussed the campaign informally with colleagues—an important, word-of-mouth, peer communication aspect which should not be overlooked.

Respondents were offered five ways to describe their own experience of the campaign (question 3), ranging from 'It was of no value to me' to 'It was an eye-opener to me'. If these are placed on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the most positive), the mean response was 3.6—closest to 'It was valuable in raising my awareness'.

The positive response to this question as to how Football for All had engaged the individual personally was reflected in responses to a later general question (8), seeking an assessment of the impact of the campaign on the image of football in Northern Ireland. Offered four alternatives, ranging from 'none at all' to 'a great deal', and ranking these as 1 to 4, the average response was 3.2—closest to 'quite a lot'.

It was clear from the responses that this assessment was significantly founded on the campaign activity to change the atmosphere at Northern Ireland games at Windsor Park. The main body of questions (4-7) asked respondents what specific impact they felt the campaign had had on different levels (international / Irish League) and dimensions (watching/playing) of the game, broken down in terms of widening involvement in the sport by religion, gender, ethnicity and (dis)ability.

The range from 'none at all' to 'a great deal' was offered throughout, and the most positive response, again an average 3.2, was *vis-à-vis* the perceived impact of Football for All on sectarian behaviour at international matches. The next most positive average (3.0) was in response to a similar question about racist behaviour at Northern Ireland games, again indicative of a 'quite a lot' assessment of campaign effect.

The desired goal at internationals, and indeed at all levels of the game where there are spectators, has often been described as a 'family' environment, which in reality means a less male-dominated spectator profile, and one (relatedly) deemed safer for the introduction of children. A significant impact (average 2.7) was perceived in attendance by women and by girls at Northern Ireland games.

Interestingly, the greatest effectiveness of the campaign in encouraging participation in the sport was perceived to be in women's and girls' football (average 2.9). There was similarly encouragement in terms of stimulating participation among people with disabilities, where again an average score of 2.7 came closest to the 'quite a lot' evaluation of impact.

These results reflect positively on the efforts of the IFA's community relations officer, Mr Boyd, and his colleagues working to promote women's football and football involving people with disabilities, Ms Booth and Mr Crooks respectively. By the same token, less positive responses reflect gaps which remain to be filled, and which on any objective assessment are beyond the capacity of these three dedicated individuals to fill on their own.

Most noticeable in this regard was the relative weakness of the impact of the campaign at the level of the Irish League. Thus, the perceived effect on tackling sectarian and racist behaviour at Irish League grounds averaged out at 2.4 and 2.3 respectively—much weaker than the results for international games. Worse, in terms of encouraging attendance at games by Catholics and by members of ethnic minorities, the average response was only 2.1 and 2.0 respectively. So respondents detected 'not much' impact

of Football for All at this level. Indeed, on every count of historically weakly represented groups in the stands, greater progress was deemed to have been made in attendance at internationals than at Irish League games.

One particularly interesting feature of the responses was the significance respondents attached to the campaign in the future. While this may have been skewed by the response rate (the most concerned being the most likely to respond), what was most striking was the unanimity among respondents, looking to the years ahead, as to the high importance of seven campaigning activities, existing or potential, presented to them:

- generating broader media and public awareness,
- using star players as role models,
- ensuring the new stadium is welcoming to all,
- lobbying for extension of the Football Offences Act,
- getting supporters to buy into the code of conduct,
- tying new money for facilities to engagement with the campaign, and
- developing a guidebook for clubs.

Again, a range from ‘not at all important’ to ‘very important’ was offered by way of assessment, again convertible to a score from 1 to 4. On every one of the activities, the average response was 3.5 or higher—closest to the ‘very important’ category. Returning to the earlier point about the importance of word of mouth, and looking ahead to later comments about the ‘co-production’ of the Football for All campaign, this suggests there are individuals out there, willing to act as purveyors of the campaign along these lines.

## 6.2 Respondents’ comments

As interesting as the statistics from the survey were the individual comments. These tended to distinguish those involved in the Football for All campaign from the IFA as a whole.

One Northern Ireland Supporters’ Club member wrote: ‘I feel that much of the success of the campaign has been down to the energy and commitment of Michael Boyd.’ Similarly, a coach volunteered: ‘Good campaign—Michael and his team deserve high praise for their courageous efforts in making football more accessible.’ Another coach said, however: ‘Apart from the CR department of IFA, the rest needs revamped. It’s stuck in the past and pays lip service to important issues; the knock-on effect is the state of our international team and league. Change needs to happen at every level within the game/IFA.’ A club secretary concurred: ‘I realise that this is not an easy task but there is no future for the IFA without radical change.’

The recurring theme of the disjunction between what had been achieved at the international level and the situation in the Irish League was, as one would expect, very apparent in referees’ responses. One referee who had officiated at more than 20 league and cup games in the last year detected no change in sectarian or racist behaviour, describing the incidence of the former as ‘high’. Another referee said: ‘I believe that the Football for All campaign has been very successful in creating a positive family atmosphere at home international games. However, I believe that Irish League games and NI away games need to be looked at in creating the right atmosphere which everyone can enjoy.’

Another referee again opined: ‘The coverage and “buy-in” at international level has been superb but more needs to be done to get “down and dirty” at domestic level where sectarian attitudes and religious bigotry tend to be more difficult to reach. Clubs appear reluctant to move against offenders for fear of upsetting their “core” support and stewards regularly turn a blind eye to this abuse. It has been easier tackling this at international level and taking this down to the next level won’t be easy.’

Northern Ireland supporters were even more aware of the difference the campaign had made at internationals, compared with the impact on the Irish League. The supporter respondents all felt Football for All had made ‘a great deal’ of change in terms of sectarian behaviour in the former case, but ‘not much’ in the latter.

An Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs officer said: ‘The success of the Football for All campaign has been greatest at international match level where it has been an astounding success, largely due to the co-operation of the NI fans. This same co-operation from club fans is needed if it is to become a success at Irish League level. If the fans are not “on board” any campaign will fail.’

One coach suggested that clubs that do not participate in Football for All should face the threat of points deductions. He was concerned that if the focus was on the carrot of aid, rather than sticks, money might be diverted into players’ wages. A player-cum-coach warned: ‘In my view most IPL clubs are only interested in first-team survival. The money gets eaten [up] by this.’

Coaches tended to stress investment in the development of the game: targeting schools, improving facilities for junior clubs and so on. One who said he was involved at all levels, ‘from grassroots to senior clubs’, affirmed: ‘I have found an improvement in all

areas highlighted in this questionnaire.’ But another said: ‘In our experience this initiative had no benefit for us ... The IFA needs to get out of Belfast and start supporting the clubs at grassroots level.’

A women’s team manager went to some trouble to give additional information about incidents of sectarianism he had encountered (stressing in passing that he believed it was a ‘myth’ that there was no sectarianism in the women’s game). His message was: ‘I think working at the grassroots is key.’ A coach and youth manager said: ‘Get a good foundation and you’ll build a good structure.’

Developmental work obviously takes time, though the eventual return on the investment may well justify it, and another important theme to emerge from the survey responses was the need to take a long view, implying sustained commitment to the campaign. While attitudinal change is notoriously slow, by the same token it can be progressive and sustained if a consistent message is presented over a long period. Changes in attitudes to drink-driving and to smoking in public places are good examples.

One coach and club manager captured this well: ‘If we keep the campaign in place the old mindset will change [and] the way people think. Therefore attendance etc should improve in local soccer as well as internationals.’ Another in a similar capacity said: ‘Remember the road is long.’ Another again said: ‘People don’t change overnight but the campaign is our only hope!’

## 7. The interviews

### 7.1 General view

Interviewees for this project were generally highly positive in their assessment of the Football for All campaign, though very much associating it with what was seen as the infectious enthusiasm of the community-relations officer, Mr Boyd. As the top referee Alan Snoddy put it, ‘he’s made other people feel part of it and take ownership of it’.

The Cliftonville FC community-relations officer, Gerard Lawlor, is well placed to give a grassroots view of the campaign. ‘I think it is fantastic,’ he said. ‘I can’t praise Michael Boyd hard enough for the dedication and commitment he puts into it.’

Jim Roddy, manager of Derry City FC, with his side playing in the Eircom League, has no partisan reason to endorse the work of the Football for All campaign. But he said: ‘Michael’s done sterling work; he’s done tremendous work, against very extreme odds. The image of the game in the north has cleaned up dramatically from a sectarian point of view.’

There is more to this than enthusiasm. Mr Boyd himself pointed out that when he began the job in February 2000 he had no action plan ‘to get my teeth into’. He subsequently developed a very extensive action plan as part of a 2002-2006 strategy for the campaign (Boyd, 2002), with fully 136 action points to be pursued, which have clearly formed the basis of his very substantial efforts since.

If anything, this may be a case of trying too hard, and there is an argument for taking stock five years on and developing a more focused set of aims and objectives for the next five years, with a smaller number of associated projects, which can then be more effectively evaluated than such a myriad of action points. Maura Muldoon of the Northern Ireland Women’s Football Association correspondingly made both these comments: Mr Boyd has ‘done wonderful work’ but ‘I’m not sure what the strategy is.’

Further objective assessments of what the IFA has achieved as a whole via the campaign come from those—such as those working in the arena of sport for people with disabilities—who can take a comparative view across sporting codes. Aubrey Bingham of Disability Sport Northern Ireland said that there was a ‘lot of lip-service’ in sport to addressing disability issues, but the IFA and its disability officer, Alan Crooks, had done more. His colleague Kevin O’Neill concurred. No other governing body was working to include people with disabilities, he said: ‘The IFA should be congratulated on their commitment.’

A similar assessment came from John News of the Sports Council. He said that ‘a whole range of other sports’ had ‘barely acknowledged’ the issues. The IFA had put its head over the parapet, whereas others still had their ‘heads in the sand’. Indeed, an index of the IFA’s achievements was the suggestion by his colleague Angharad Bunt that it could do more to share its experiences, good and bad, with other governing bodies.

Approaching the issue from the standpoint of women’s football, Ms Muldoon said that this might have been seen in the past as a ‘mild irritation’ but the IFA had ‘made tremendous strides in the last 8-10 years’. There was, though, ‘still a lot of work to do’.

Last but not least, the view of government is obviously important in itself. Ciaran Mee of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure said that ‘we very much welcome the Football for All campaign’. It had been ‘a very positive and necessary thing to do’, he said, and the IFA should continue and extend it. Mr Boyd was ‘very enthused and engaged’ but the department was ‘not sure about what actual difference it’s making on the ground’, against the backdrop of the ‘very bad’ data on the non-inclusive character of the sport revealed by the research carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers (DCAL, 2001) around the time of its establishment.

It was very clear from this interview in particular (see below on the IFA) that government will expect the association to be much more diligent and rigorous in collecting data on participation in, and support for, the sport in Northern Ireland if it is to back its efforts. This independent research can itself, of course, contribute, seeking as it does to give a rounded picture, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, of the impact of the Football for All campaign in more detail.

### 7.2 Examples of good practice

The overwhelmingly recognised achievement of the Football for All Campaign has been in terms of the work around internationals—not just the efforts to control sectarian chants and emblems but also, and more positively, the broader effort to make attendance at Northern Ireland games an enjoyable experience, including by pre-match and half-time entertainment. This also provides golden opportunities to get the message across to a ‘captive audience’ of thousands, whether via a display by the Chinese Football Association, a samba band or a Northern Ireland player carrying a ‘Give Racism the Red Card’ placard. The mural at Windsor Park, with giants of the game in its history, now confronts arriving spectators rather than sectarian graffiti.

‘The difference has been unbelievable,’ said Stephen Watson of BBC Northern Ireland. The disability officer, Mr Crooks, said the ‘carnival atmosphere’ that had been created represented a ‘huge improvement’. Steven Beacom of the *Belfast Telegraph* highlighted in particular the ‘sea of green’ initiative to persuade supporters to attire themselves in the team colours (rather than in colours suggestive of the Union flag). He said that ‘that worked superbly because everyone got involved’. It was not just colourful in media terms but welcoming to a ‘family’ audience. Mr Snoddy described it in terms of a change in the moral climate. In the past, he said, sectarian incidents had been accepted; now they were seen as a matter of ‘outrage’.

The development officer, Ian Stewart, pointed to the effect of the campaign in bringing full houses to Windsor Park, even for such games as the ‘meaningless’ friendly against Norway. More supporters were wearing the Northern Ireland shirts, and more were attending away games, he said. A former Northern Ireland player of course himself, Mr Stewart said it represented a ‘big, big change’ and players appreciated the bigger crowds and better atmosphere.

The community-relations officer, Mr Boyd, recognises that he needs to support ‘strategic projects’, instancing the Unity Cup involving ethnic-minority teams as another example. But it is also true that important work has been done with very grassroots projects, such as with Dungoyne Boys’ Club.

Mark McClean of Dungoyne Boys—and one effect of its engagement with Football for All is a possible change of name, acknowledging the growing involvement of girls and women coaches—spoke of how Mr Boyd (‘I can’t speak highly enough of him’) had been able to help when a black youngster who had joined the club had suffered ‘some terrible abuse in the junior league’. A session had been arranged for some 10 people associated with the club with the anti-racism trainer David White and four key individuals had taken part in a racism awareness course at the IFA. He wanted to see more coaches take part in such courses, so that they could ‘correct’ young people in this regard. He himself now planned to take a disability course. This animation of key figures on the ground, though much less visible than the work at internationals, is of critical value.

While backing literally street-level projects such as these is essential to getting the Football for All message out to the widest public, this can represent a dissipation of energy unless good practice is distilled and conveyed to others, who may then be stimulated to develop similar projects in their own localities. The Waterworks Midnight Street Soccer project (supported by the Sports Council’s community support programme), working with disadvantaged kids at a north Belfast interface, has been made the subject of an entertaining and informative DVD for the campaign, potentially encouraging others to appreciate what they can achieve in their localities.

### **7.3 Failures and lessons to be learned**

In inviting interviewees to reflect on weaknesses of the campaign to date, critical comments about the IFA as an organisation frequently came up. Comments like ‘the same old faces’, ‘the old blazers’ and ‘the old brigade’ recurred. And there were also concerns about ‘massive issues around identity’, about ‘chill factors’ like the ban on Sunday games (see below) which contradicted the Football for All campaign.

Specific difficulties were also identified by the disability officer, Mr Crooks. Transport for after-school activities was a problem, he said, which education and library boards should address. He also identified the need for effective partnerships so that the IFA did not duplicate the work of others: he gave the example of a clash between the Community Cup and a Special Olympics athletics event, which would not happen now as the two organisations liaised with each other.

### **7.4 Responsibilities of government**

One area where the Football for All campaign has clearly been unsuccessful is in lobbying for the extension of the Football Offences Act 1991 to Northern Ireland, allowing the outlawing of racist and sectarian chanting. Mr Mee of DCAL could only say that his department had been in discussion with the Northern Ireland Office ‘on the possible need for new public-order legislation’ in support of the envisaged legislation on safety. The same minister, David Hanson, covers both, so this is simply a matter of political will to act.

The failure to act on this issue in Northern Ireland in recent years is in marked contrast to the efforts of the Scottish Executive to grasp the nettle (see below). It has, arguably, made life more difficult for stewards at football games in Northern Ireland: Jim Rainey of the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs argued that stewards needed this ‘legislative backing’ and the respective roles of stewards and the police needed to be clarified.

A further concern expressed about government’s role also involved the Scottish comparison. The well-regarded anti-sectarian campaigning organisation Nil By Mouth has been funded by the Scottish Executive. Yet the Football for All campaign has been dependent hitherto on ‘Peace II’ funding via the Community Relations Council (£160,000 over three years) and £20,000 a year from UEFA, though the Sports Council contributes to the disability and women’s officer posts.

This can be put in the context of the new policy framework on community relations, *A Shared Future*, issued by the direct-rule administration in March without any formal launch in a myriad of documents published before the Westminster election. This contains a strong set of aims and objectives but much more variable contributions by departments. DCAL is one of the departments which offers no new suggestions at all as to proposed actions, merely rehearsing what it is already doing. In a single paragraph on sport (OFMDFM, 2005: 44), it describes the Football for All campaign as ‘worthy of note’.

By contrast, the Scottish Executive has a ‘One Scotland, Many Cultures’ campaign, which has been pursued through posters, television advertising and so on. The work that the Scottish Executive has done to tackle sectarianism in football (see below) has been set in this broader context. Ministers have played a hands-on role, with the justice minister associated with anti-sectarian soccer initiatives and the first minister leading the broader effort—for example, by chairing the summit on sectarianism earlier this year and meeting supporters’ representatives from the Old Firm teams. And an official in the equality unit of the Scottish Executive has now been working full-time for two years with SPL clubs on giving the ‘Show Racism the Red Card’ initiative a Scottish dimension.

Mr Rainey of the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs said government needed to get beyond the idea that there was an ‘acceptable level’ of intolerance in football. He said that ‘they have to believe that this is worthwhile and worth investing’ in. It had to be ‘moved up their list of priorities’.

More than one interviewee described the much-vaunted £8 million for the soccer strategy, as Ed Smith of BBC Northern Ireland put it, as ‘a drop in the ocean’. There are, of course, demands from other sports, though there is a strong case for saying football can be privileged in the public interest (see section 8): Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA said that if government was serious about ‘sport for the masses’ it did have to inject resources accordingly. It puts this figure in perspective to learn that DCAL is capable of finding £12 million for an ‘Ulster-Scots academy’ (DCAL news release, June 29th 2005)—a skewing of priorities difficult to justify objectively, given that no one actually speaks ‘Ulster-Scots’ as a mother tongue and more than one third of the adult population has an interest in football.

## 7.5 Responsibilities of clubs

The community-relations officer, Mr Boyd, himself admits that his ‘main focus’ since being appointed five years ago has been on internationals, working with Northern Ireland fans to create ‘a more family-friendly’ and inclusive atmosphere at Windsor Park, and that he has correspondingly neglected the Irish League. The coaching director, Mr Millar, agreed that the campaign was still only ‘scratching the surface with Irish League clubs’. But the overwhelmingly positive external reaction to Mr Boyd’s activism and enthusiasm supports his defence that it is simply too much for one person.

In any event, both Mr Boyd and Mr Millar thought the merger between the league and the association would make it possible to replicate the achievements at international level with the clubs. Key to this will be working with the new Irish League Supporters’ Association, in a similar fashion to the success to date with the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs.

As the academic and former Linfield and Portadown player Jonathan Magee puts it, Irish League football has been characterised by a ‘Protestant hegemony’, deriving from the history of the foundation of clubs—Glentoran evolving from Harland and Wolff workers, Linfield from Linfield mill workers—‘in industrial areas that were predominantly Protestant’ (Magee, 2005: 173). This was compounded by the sectarian tensions which forced the withdrawal of first Belfast Celtic (1949) and Derry City (1972) from the Irish League, though more positively Donegal Celtic secured entry into the second division in the 2002-03 season.

Ironically, Cliftonville was the first Irish League club to appoint a community-relations officer (*Irish News*, October 20th 2000), interviewed for this project. Noel Doran, editor of the *Irish News*, suggested the IFA should assist Donegal Celtic, which had taken a lot of flak in west Belfast for playing an RUC team and felt it had ‘struggled for recognition’.

In addition to trying to restore senior-club status to a west Belfast club, Mr Doran suggested, more initiatives like the recent Linfield-Derry City friendly could be considered. The manager of Derry City FC, Mr Roddy, said those who had attacked the Linfield bus after the game had been ‘eternally shamed’ and he was confident: ‘That won’t happen again.’ Mr Roddy also indicated that he would have welcomed an approach to the club as a potential sponsor of a local Football Development Centre, whereas only the city council had been approached.

DCAL (2005) was at time of writing consulting on a Safety of Sports Ground (Northern Ireland) Order, which would introduce a safety-certification scheme similar to that in Great Britain for larger grounds and (non-temporary) spectator stands. If introduced it will apply to grounds with capacity for more than 5,000 spectators and be administered by district councils. The department envisages paying, via the Sports Council, some £16.2 million towards the estimated £19 million cost of compliance across soccer, Gaelic games and rugby.

An interesting example of clubs showing responsibility is the Old Firm Alliance launched in April (Scottish Executive news release, April 19th 2005), following the February 2005 summit on sectarianism in Scotland, led by the first minister (record available at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)). Some 25,000 green-and-blue wristbands with the message 'Say No to Sectarianism' have been distributed to 200 schools in the greater Glasgow area (BBC Online, April 20th 2005).

Strong concerns about disability were also expressed in terms of clubs—both access as supporters and support for local players with disabilities. Several interviewees complained how Irish League clubs focused on their first team, and disability was one of the issues identified as falling under the radar screen in terms of wider community responsibilities.

The disability officer, Mr Crooks, complained that interest here was 'non-existent' and it hadn't 'sunk in' with clubs that they now had legal responsibilities to address questions of access, including to disabled toilets, under the Disability Discrimination Act. Ballymena United FC had shown what could be done, with disabled toilets and lifts allowing wheelchair access to any part of an area running along the top of the stands at the Showgrounds. Gerry McGladdery of Disability Action argued that investment in new facilities arising from the soccer strategy could be tied to the 'access issues included' principle.

Similar complaints were made by the women's officer, Ms Booth. 'Some of the toilets are disgusting,' she said, at Irish League grounds. And she pointed to how for women spectators bad language was 'a big thing', as was illicit alcohol consumption. 'The language is awful at Irish League grounds,' the development officer, Mr Stewart, agreed. Clearly, there is potential here, as identified below (section 8), to see Football for All as a way to enhance attendances at Irish League games, just as it has succeeded in turning Northern Ireland games into sell-outs, even when performance has been poor.

The anti-racism trainer David White made an interesting observation in terms of clubs encouraging participation by migrant workers. The World United football team, based on refugees and migrants, has been a valuable innovation stemming from the campaign, but Mr White pointed out the potential resource here for clubs since many migrant workers—by definition, preponderantly young men—came from strong footballing countries (Portuguese, for example). Clubs could make these connections via organisations like STEP in Dungannon, plugged into migrant networks.

Steven Beacom of the *Belfast Telegraph* said the Irish League should 'back a winning jockey'. He said: 'The Football for All campaign could actually get more people into the grounds if only they get behind it.' He contrasted the 'sense of fun' now at Northern Ireland games with the 'sense of fear' at Irish League matches, highlighting the clashes at the recent Linfield-Glentoran game.

As secretary of the Irish Premier League, Dave McVeigh has already been working with the community-relations officer in endeavouring to engender a 'fun' and 'friendly' atmosphere in key cup games: CIS finals and Irish Cup semi-finals and finals. He has also been able to draw on Mr Boyd's assistance where clubs have identified problems, as has been the case this season in terms of racism at Ballymena United FC and Larne FC. The assistance of Mr White had been 'very well received' and the two club chairs were 'very complimentary' about the contribution both men had made, he said.

It is also the case that the coach-training aspect of the campaign has touched the clubs. Irish League managers and coaches are expected to be coached to A-licence level. The coaching director, Mr Millar, stressed their importance as conduits for the campaign in the clubs. The next step was to engage chairs, committees and supporters, he said.

But here Mr McVeigh painted a challenging picture. Clubs were largely run by volunteers, with too little structure in terms of marketing, registration, transport and so on, he said. The club secretary was 'a key, key figure', and it had to be a club priority that this person was a full-time employee. The safety officer would be trained by the Sports Council but if paid it would only be on match day; the same applied to stewards.

Mr McVeigh said safety officers and stewards received about eight hours training, whereas he estimated in more safety-conscious English clubs this would be about 48 hours. Stewards thus tended to see themselves playing a 'passive' rather than 'proactive' role: 'This *laissez-faire* attitude is not acceptable.' There was a need for a 'more professional, more co-ordinated approach'. For example, supporters engaging in racist chanting needed to be ejected from the ground, with an approach of 'zero tolerance'.

Mr Lawlor of Cliftonville FC admitted that stewarding was 'a big problem'. He agreed with Mr McVeigh: 'The whole game needs to be more professional.'

The Irish Premier League secretary saw the answer lying in an extension of UEFA's club licensing programme. The Derry City manager, Mr Roddy, described how acquisition of the UEFA licence had been associated with a considerable tightening up of administration, including the employment of 36 paid stewards, as well as an event controller and a safety officer.

But Mr McVeigh said the UEFA scheme didn't specify requirements on stewarding as such and, in any event, clubs that had no prospect of competing in European competitions had no incentive to comply. What was envisaged, however, within the IFA was a 'club audit' procedure for a 'domestic licence'. This would ascertain if clubs were being run 'in a professional manner'. It would



be required of all premiership clubs and others would be encouraged to take part. The development officer, Mr Stewart, said of the clubs: 'I think they need to be forced to do certain things.'

He pointed to how in Germany *all* soccer clubs, including for juniors, had to be licensed. This included training requirements for the personnel involved, the marking out of pitches—even where coaches and parents could stand—and dealing with bad language. Legal action could follow breaches.

Mr McVeigh said the criteria to be included in the new arrangement were being determined this year, with a view to rolling out next year (changes to IFA articles of association might be required at the AGM). The club audit would aim to ensure that enough stewards were trained, as well as the safety officer, and the possibility of additional training should be investigated, he said.

Last year, the anti-racism trainer, Mr White conducted a training session for stewards from all premiership clubs. Mr McVeigh would like to see safety officers getting paid time off in advance of games to attend organisational meetings with their counterparts (and the two club secretaries), before giving stewards specific briefings the night before the match.

The auditing process would lead to a 'template' being developed by the association for clubs, an 'overall framework document' from which, for example, new clubs would start, he said. This could also be a vehicle to extend the code of conduct for international supporters to club level.

The IFA could usefully consult with the Scottish FA on this work. According to John Gilmour of the Scottish Executive, the SFA requires all league clubs to have a clear policy on racism and sectarianism. A full-time licensing officer is employed by the association, visiting clubs to ensure this is 'not just tokenism'. There remains a question-mark, however, over how much this cascades down to the Highland League and junior football—where behaviour sometimes, Mr Gilmour said, could be 'quite appalling'.

Mr News of the Sports Council addressed this question of the junior game. He argued that the IFA could develop a 'quality kitemark' for clubs taking part in leagues it endorsed.

Mr White echoed Mr McVeigh's stress on stewards' importance: 'They are the people the fans look to to protect them.' He argued that clubs could 'put small things in place a bit at a time' and he pointed to how by putting policies and procedures in place, clubs not only offered a means of redress if things went wrong but also protected themselves as well—as, for example, was the case with organising public-liability insurance. So it was 'in everybody's interests' to do so.

In every discussion of clubs during this research finance was never far from the conversation. Not unreasonably, interviewees referred to the way clubs in England had benefited from assistance to improve facilities in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster, which had not been replicated in Northern Ireland. But the question of priorities was raised: the development officer, Mr Stewart, pointed to the amateur club Knockbreda which had established perfectly good toilets, partly with a view to establishing a girls' team, and Irish League clubs could do likewise.

Several interviewees—and this included a senior source in the GAA who declined to be interviewed attributably—saw the way ahead as clubs becoming broader 'community', rather than (not very successful) 'business', enterprises. The referee Mr Snoddy pointed out how stadia were left idle six days a week when they could be used, for example, for youth development (as will be the case if any Football Development Centres are club-based). They could also offer venues for local senior citizens' activities, play groups, aerobics, business meetings and so on. In a wider European context, he said, it would be rare to arrive at a stadium and not find it being used by locals during the day, generating income.

There is a way that clubs can stabilise their financial position and promote a 'community' self-image consistent with the philosophy of Football for All. It is an ownership model which the Home Office minister Andy Burnham MP predicted that by 2020 most English clubs—many of which are of course in straitened circumstances—would adopt: supporters' trusts. Mr Burnham was co-founder of Supporters Direct, which promotes this model, and there are now more than 120 democratic supporters' trust, with 13 of them owning or at least controlling their clubs.

Chesterfield, for example, eliminated a £2 million debt and now enjoys the highest gates for a quarter of a century. The club is pursuing its community ethos by developing a partnership with its local authority on health, education and social inclusion initiatives. To help children with literacy and numeracy problems, it has developed a 'Read On Write Away' programme, where kids write match reports, diet sheets and menus for the players. And the club has led local health campaigns such as the 'Five a Day' fruit-and-vegetable message; players have worn shirts with an anti-smoking advertisement from the health authority (*Guardian*, August 6th 2005).

Mr News of the Sports Council spoke of how Irish League clubs could engage in outreach work with the local community, including in areas 'up the road or down the road' from where they had not drawn support in the past. He pointed to research by Glenavon FC, which had demonstrated the club's capacity to reach out to the public in Lurgan as a whole, despite its historic

association with the Protestant community. It had sought to tap this through engaging with local schools, while it had also built non-traditional support through establishing a women's team. Not only attendance but sponsorship could follow such initiatives, his colleague Ms Bunt said.

Mr Lawlor of Cliftonville FC, conscious of his own club's fragility, agreed that this was the way to go. 'We need to become interactive with our communities,' he said. 'We need to get out into the community.' The ideal was to 'start from mothers and toddlers in the morning to old-age pensioners in the evening'.

In terms of young people, he said, Cliftonville had begun running mini-soccer and coaching for kids, visiting schools and youth groups and bringing them to games—and, in the process, getting youngsters to realise Protestants and Catholics were 'no different'. The club was working on a potential kids' coaching exchange relationship with Glentoran.

One initiative clubs could take in this regard would be to associate themselves with local disabled teams, said Jim Weatherill of Special Olympics Ulster, pointing to disabled teams supported by English Premiership teams like Chelsea and Middlesbrough. The disability officer is working with Special Olympics on the setting up of a disabled league. 'That's how popular it's getting,' Mr Weatherill said. This would offer a structure with which Irish League clubs could engage. Such a link could be 'a big plus for the clubs', Mr Bingham of Disability Sport said.

Another innovative suggestion was that clubs which sought to position themselves at the heart of the local community need not be blinkered by seeing themselves as only engaged in football. They could, like any entrepreneurial company, 'diversify' into related sports (as the ultimate community club, Barcelona, has done) or build on the popularity (and commercial success) of fitness suites, Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA said.

All these initiatives would be distinguished by clubs drawing local residents into an 'interactive' relationship with them. The development officer, Mr Stewart, felt this was a key aspect of Football for All. 'You can have a campaign but it is better if the campaign involves activity.' Information itself, while valuable—'leaflets are great, billboards are great'—was not enough. And such activity led on to word-of-mouth promotion of the campaign.

Unlike the conventional model of clubs being run by a small group of local worthies, this structure has the potential to tap into the much wider and deeper enthusiasm that there is for the game and to engender support and loyalty. A seminar organised for clubs by the association, with an invited speaker from Supporters Direct, would be a simple but effective way to bring this message to a Northern Ireland audience.

Nevertheless, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that the current Irish League structure will not be viable in the long run, given the fate of Omagh Town FC and Coleraine FC in recent months. Ms Muldoon said she thought the future would only allow of one or two good teams in Belfast and one or two in Dublin. The broadcaster-sponsored Setanta Cup (see below) indicated there was a market for north-south collaboration/competition, and the wider significance of the border was declining.

This does raise the question as to whether there is a case for looking at this in a wider Irish context. The manager of Derry City, Mr Roddy, argued that there had to be a 'massive' rationalisation. Domestic clubs needed to get together, he said, envisaging a future 16-team all-Ireland league. The two associations, he contended, had other things on their plates as well as senior club football and it was up to the clubs, in his view, to come up with a 'blueprint' which they could put to the associations.

This view echoed comments by Nigel Smyth, regional director of the Confederation of British Industry. He said the impression in business of Irish League football was that it was 'all Mickey Mouse', but that if it became more 'professional' and moved 'towards an all-Ireland league' it could attract more sponsorship. It also seems a much less radical position in the wake of the success of the Setanta Cup, which could incrementally progress in that direction, and the warming of relations between the IFA and the FAI in recent years.

Of course the danger inherent in such an approach is that it could enhance inequality in the game between the wealthier and struggling clubs. It was perhaps for this reason that Mr Lawlor of Cliftonville FC gave a different perspective: an All-Ireland league 'would kill football at this point in time', he said.

One imaginative form of rationalisation suggested by Ms Muldoon was ground-sharing. Rather than dissipating resources around a large number of small stadia, she argued, better to concentrate it. If this seemed unthinkable for, say Glentoran and Linfield, they might consider Inter and AC Milan. Government, she said, should privilege investment decisions with finite resources where clubs were willing to amalgamate facilities, employ professional coaches and so on: 'The days of volunteers are over.' And this should not be based on an *ad hoc* bidding process but have a firm legislative foundation (such as with the prospective safety order). It could, she added, be 'part of a wider reconciliation agenda'.

If dealing with the Irish League clubs more systematically is a large enough challenge for the moment, the development officer, Mr Stewart, pointed to the even larger one (in terms of numbers) of junior football. 'Michael's message should be pushed out to

boys' and girls' clubs,' he said. For the moment, resources dictate that he only respond to specific requests for help (as with projects like Dungoyne Boys). Indeed, Mr Stewart questioned whether Irish League clubs were 'up for it'; he would prefer to concentrate on young people as future players and supporters. He linked the development of junior supporters' clubs to club licensing arrangements.

## 7.6 Role of supporters

The role of supporters *vis-à-vis* the Football for All campaign is explored in the next section. This is partly because of the rich material gleaned from the fans' focus groups, but also because of the importance of this issue in particular for the success of the campaign.

## 7.7 Role of players

The community-relations officer, Mr Boyd, has used Northern Ireland 'star' players to promote the message at Windsor. But he admitted that work with Irish League players so far had been 'minimal'. The development officer, Mr Stewart, said players were valuable as role models, as 'kids don't know who we are' and it was important to 'use people who are relevant' to young people. The anti-racism trainer, Mr White, said that, negatively, players had the capacity to inflame supporters by comments or gestures.

The Irish Premier League secretary, Mr McVeigh, pointed to ways in which players could be disciplined for behaviour contravening the aspirations of the campaign. Professional players' contracts, he pointed out, would include a clause giving the club the power to suspend a player or dock wages if he was deemed to have brought the club into disrepute. As regards amateur players, the club constitution would similarly empower it to deal with a player deemed so to have done.

A spontaneous gesture by Linfield, whose players wore black armbands in the Setanta Cup match with Longford a few days after the Pope died, was very well received. The editor of the *Irish News*, Noel Doran, described the initiative as 'absolutely astonishing'. 'That is bound to leak through to the fans,' said Ed Smith of BBC Northern Ireland. Linfield has, of course, had a longstanding relationship with Dundalk in the 'Dunfield' initiative supported by Co-operation Ireland.

The coaching director, Mr Millar, said one way to address player behaviour more systematically would be to have fair-play awards for clubs. But ensuring such initiatives are effectively sustained is difficult in the absence of a formal structure for players' representation.

This issue, raised by the Advisory Panel (2001: 50-51), recurred in the interviews. Discussion should be opened between the IFA and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to see if an existing trade union would be willing to take 'under its wing' a Northern Ireland Professional Footballers' Association, as the panel recommended.

## 7.8 Responsibilities of IFA

This report has argued for the integration of Football for All into every aspect of the work of the IFA; the corollary is that everything the IFA does, or is deemed to have failed to have done, can have an impact on the effectiveness of the campaign. Thus, to take just two news stories on successive days in June 2005, the association was reported as being taken to task by DCAL over the auditing problems that had delayed the release of the £8 million anticipated to support the soccer strategy ('IFA's failings putting £8m at risk', *Belfast Telegraph*, June 22nd 2005), and was described as being potentially vulnerable to expulsion from FIFA over the ban on Sunday playing ('Irish FA in trouble over "never on a Sunday" rule', *Belfast Telegraph*, June 22nd 2005).

In both cases the chief executive was reported as taking a robust stance. But the success of the Football for All campaign does depend on the IFA being seen to have 'its house in order' more generally. Concern was expressed by one interviewee about poor attendance by senior IFA staff at equity training sessions, which sends a poor signal *vis-à-vis* commitment to the campaign. And the ban on playing on Sunday was widely criticised by interviewees—more than one of whom noted how it was brought into disrepute by players being picked for Northern Ireland even though they frequently played on Sunday for their clubs across the water. Mr Wells said this was an issue not of playing on Sunday as such but of the need for tolerance of different opinions—of those who were happy to play on Sunday and those who were not.

The dilemma was captured by Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA, whose professional work is for the Police Service of Northern Ireland on diversity issues. She said the challenge was one of changing a membership organisation into a 'developmental' one, given the 'what we have we hold' resistance that engendered.

In the late 90s, the Sports Council identified the criteria which governing bodies had to meet to act in a manner conducive to reconciliation in Northern Ireland. These included ensuring their constitution was open and accessible to all, that letterheads and

symbols were neutral, that the latter was also true of major tournament venues, and that games were played on days and at times which suited the whole community (Bairner and Darby, 1999: 61). It is clear that the ban on Sunday games (as, conversely, the GAA's commitment normally to playing on Sunday) breaches that requirement. (The issue of venue neutrality is discussed below in the context of the new stadium.)

In very practical terms, the ban militates against the Football for All campaign's work with the Chinese community. The establishment in 2002 of the Chinese FA has been a positive development and some 25 players are now formally involved. But because many of these young men work in the catering trade, William Wong of the CFA said they had 'no choice' but to play on Sundays. This represents a very clear instance of where Northern Ireland's conventional 'two communities' view of itself is race-blind when it comes to addressing the concerns of the region's rapidly-growing ethnic-minority population.

More positively, the developmental role of the IFA is key to the success of Football for All. The community-relations officer worked with Glenavon on the club's outreach effort identified above. According to Mr News of the Sports Council (working in the area at the time and himself involved), this support from the IFA had been welcomed by the club: 'It was the governing body taking an interest' and giving the club a 'pat on the back'.

A letter from the director of the sports division of DCAL to the IFA chief executive in January (furnished by DCAL), makes this connection itself:

Both the Soccer Strategy and the IFA's related Development Plan place heavy emphasis on improving participation and inclusivity within Football. In that context, DCAL has been attempting for some time to obtain information from the IFA on current participation ... The problem seems to stem from the absence of a comprehensive system within Football for monitoring participation or profiling participants (according to gender, community background, ethnic background etc). Obviously, a better system would be very beneficial for all parties going forward, particularly if greater participation and inclusivity is to be demonstrated.

It was clear from the interview with Mr Mee of DCAL that the department would welcome a dialogue with the IFA on how these data can be systematically generated.

It is quite a challenge to gather data such as these for spectators on any comprehensive basis (as against sample surveys). But there is no reason why the IFA cannot demand of all affiliated clubs that they collect annual data on players to this effect, much in the manner that employers now routinely collect simple tick-box data on the gender, community background and ethnic background of job applicants to comply with equal-opportunities requirements.

The more difficult task is to monitor participation in the developmental aspect of the game, such as youngsters taking part in coaching sessions. But the development officer, Mr Stewart, who is supervising the introduction of the 16 Football Development Centres, said monthly reports would be required to be submitted to the IFA electronically, with the new programme evaluated after one year.

As far as is reasonably practicable, the data collected should include not just numbers of participants but be broken down by age, gender, ethnicity, perceived religious affiliation and disability (if any). This is not to 'pigeon-hole' individuals but to ensure that the IFA is reaching its target audiences through its developmental activities. If, for example, it was apparent that a mini-soccer competition was attracting disproportionately kids from controlled schools, a special effort could be made to try to engage maintained schools to redress the balance. The chief executive, Mr Wells, said 'stringent reporting' would be required of the FDCs.

The centres represent a golden opportunity to develop the Football for All campaign and take it out to the widest audience—an audience of the next cohort of active participants in the game. Mr Stewart said the grassroots development officers would have to be 'good communicators'. He envisaged the community-relations officer, Mr Boyd, organising workshops to integrate them into the campaign.

Mini-soccer centres offered another vehicle, he said, to promote Football for All. The aim should be to ensure the 50 or so centres articulated basic ideas like respect, so that the campaign message was integrated into the 'ethos' of the leaders 'out on the ground', who were currently 'adrift'.

It has been suggested that the grassroots development officers would have one hour allocated per week under their job descriptions to working with people with disabilities. The expectation is that this will drive them to develop links with special schools and adult centres. If the work is properly monitored and evaluated (without generating unreasonable burdens) this could be an important foot in the door for this work at the grassroots. As the Irish Premier League secretary, Mr McVeigh, put it, the aim had to be to ensure that 'not just nice, white, middle-class kids with Manchester United shirts' got to take part.

The same potential applies to women's football, where the women's officer, Ms Booth, argued the goal should be a 50-50 breakdown in terms of participants. She also suggested that three or four of the 16 FDC directors could be identified as taking a particular interest in girls'/women's football. The international manager can assist in these developmental aspects of the sport, Ms Booth argued. She said his role was expanding all the time and he should, for example, organise a photo-opportunity with the women's senior team.

Another positive suggestion, this time from Mr Stewart, was for the IFA to organise an 'open day' on the theme of Football for All. This would not only be an opportunity to counter the impression of a lack of openness—justified or otherwise—but also to clarify what the campaign is about (see below) in discussion with a range of media and other interlocutors.

## 7.9 Other potential champions

Coaches have already been mentioned several times as key figures in the transmission of the Football for All message. The chief executive, Mr Wells, said that 'coaches tend in any sport to have a tremendous network', often acting as 'a jack of all trades'. The FDS offered a 'much better vehicle', he said, to take that message to the grassroots.

Referees can be important interlocutors for Football for All, especially in promoting the ethos of 'fair play'. Mr Snoddy, who has worked closely with Mr Boyd in 'fair play' initiatives, gave as an example how for FIFA World Fair Play Day the latter had ensured that a top Irish League game had displayed 'fair play' symbols. He recognised how referees' responsibilities to deal with 'foul and abusive language' had 'orange and green connotations' in Northern Ireland.

Mr Boyd would also argue that he has not been able to do as much work with referees as he would like. He can point, however, to the anti-racism training day for top referees in December 2004 as an example of what could be done more comprehensively and consistently. He said referees could play key roles, not only as the match official who can 'set the tone' but also in systematically recording incidents they observed at games.

Mr Snoddy said he had found 'very much' interest among referees who attended the anti-racism day, which the anti-racism trainer Mr White agreed had gone 'really well'. He was in contact with Ms Booth in raising the number of female referees, which he estimated at only four or five. The prospective IFA referee development officer will provide a direct point of contact within the organisation, which hopefully can ensure better engagement of referees with the campaign.

An important sporting network which Mr O'Neill of Disability Sport highlighted was the community sport development officers employed by some 20 organisations, supported by the Sports Council from Big Lottery funding. There will be obvious potential synergies between these organisations and the grassroots development officers.

The most obvious champion of this campaign is, of course, government itself. Yet even violent sectarian incidents have been the subject of a 'sustained lack of attention and action' by the authorities in recent years, a recent report for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (Jarman, 2005: 56) has concluded. Surprisingly, when Mr Mee of DCAL was asked to volunteer potential champions, he did not volunteer the minister, Mr Hanson, in this regard.

His colleague Lord Rooker, responsible for the community-relations brief, plans to relaunch *A Shared Future* in the autumn. Mr Hanson should take this opportunity to highlight government's commitment to tackling sectarianism and racism in the key popular-cultural arena of sport.

## 7.10 Media coverage of the sport

Sports journalists are themselves important assessors of the success of the Football for All campaign, given the key role of the media as gatekeepers to the wider public audience of the public message and their capacity to attach positive or negative connotations to it in the public mind. On the first of these, given journalists are themselves often stereotypically perceived as a somewhat cynical breed, their responses as interviewees were remarkably positive—though distinguishing the image of Football for All from that of the IFA generally.

Steven Beacom of the *Belfast Telegraph* described Football for All as an 'unqualified success'. Mr Boyd, he said, had 'driven the campaign fantastically well'. The campaign had been launched when the IFA was being 'slated' over the Neil Lennon affair and had 'started something fresh'. The IFA, he claimed, had 'treated the media with contempt', but as for the community-relations officer: 'From a public-relations point of view he is excellent.'

Similarly, Ed Smith of BBC Northern Ireland said of Football for All: 'Really I've been very impressed by it, because young Michael has really worked very hard in a very difficult situation.' By contrast, he perceived the IFA as 'the suits' and 'riven by political infighting'.

Noel Doran, editor of the *Irish News*, said that a lot of his readers would ‘remain very cool, to put it mildly’ towards the IFA. He pointed to episodes *vis-à-vis* the Northern Ireland team - notably the way Anton Rogan and Alan McKnight were dropped by the then international manager after they had been ‘booed unmercifully’, and the bitter sectarian atmosphere surrounding the 1993 game against the republic.

More positively, Mr Smith said that while the IFA had been ‘quite closed in’ in the past, ‘Howard Wells is very open and is therefore much admired by the media’. Mr Wells conceded the force of the criticisms. He said that the association had to recognise the failings of the past’ and ‘to start building people’s confidence again’.

Other interviewees did however express ambivalent attitudes towards media coverage of football in general in Northern Ireland. On the one hand, it was recognised that sectarian or racist incidents had to be highlighted: as one interviewee put it, the treatment of Anton Rogan by some fans and the death threat to Neil Lennon had ‘galvanised supporters to change’. But on the other hand there was a concern that ‘negative stories get far more publicity than positive stories’. This is in line with a recognised tendency in media ‘news values’ to dramatise stories and their impact by focusing on change, and especially change for the worse (Hall, 1978: 22).

It was clear from the interviews and focus groups that the internet would play an ever-growing role in terms of the Football for All campaign. The community-relations officer, Mr Boyd, receives frequent e-mails from interlocutors on the ground informing him about issues or incidents. And web sites like [www.ourweecountry.co.uk/](http://www.ourweecountry.co.uk/) and [www.irishleagueforums.net/forums/](http://www.irishleagueforums.net/forums/) can be expected to become more significant in communication among fans. Mr News also pointed to the potential value of mobile-phone networks, as have been supported by the Community Relations Council to connect community workers across interfaces in Belfast, in building the network of people on the ground engaged with the campaign.

### **7.11 The new stadium**

As has been indicated, the change in the environment at the stadium for internationals has been widely recognised. So why move internationals elsewhere? The most common word used by interviewees about Windsor Park was ‘baggage’, with a widespread acceptance that whatever had been achieved the historical legacy still cast a shadow. There was also a belief that the location of the stadium adjacent to such a strongly Protestant area as the Village, as well as the association with Linfield—a concern for supporters of other clubs, resentful of the associated subsidy to the club—made change imperative, though Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA suggested that change could be eased by transitional financial arrangements. Indeed, by far the greatest controversy in the interviews was over the site of the new stadium, with opinion divided between the Maze and a central location in Belfast.

One suggestion was that a Northern Ireland ‘hall of fame’ could be established at the stadium, marking achievements by figures associated with the game over past decades. The coaching director, Mr Millar, pointed to the absence of a training centre in Northern Ireland; this too could be incorporated into the *new* stadium.

A key issue *vis-à-vis* the stadium - and key to its viability - will be its capacity to attract rugby and Gaelic games as well as football. A senior GAA source indicated that its concerns were practical (differing pitch size) rather than ideological. And it would clearly send out a strong signal, consonant with the Football for All message of tolerance, if codes concentrated in different religions (or social classes) were played in the same stadium. Indeed, the women’s officer, Ms Booth, emphasised it should involve girls’ rugby and camogie, as well as women’s football, too.

The CBI regional director, Mr Smyth, was more upbeat about the sponsorship potential of the new stadium than the Irish League. He associated it with a capacity to promote a civic pride in football, where ‘you lose the sectarianism’, and to ‘increase the profile of the game’. Mr Millar saw this prefigured in the atmosphere surrounding the recent Milk Cup, characterised by ‘passion, everything that’s good about the game’, with ‘no hang-ups’ about flags, sectarianism and so on. He pointed to the irony of Coleraine’s ground being packed for the event, at the very time the club was facing financial meltdown.

The stadium, of course, offers a great opportunity to improve facilities available to spectators. For example, it could address Mr Crooks’ concern that even where facilities are provided for disabled access, they currently tend to involve the segregation of disabled supporters from others, which carries a sense of stigma. Mr McGladdery of Disability Action pointed to the Millennium Stadium in Wales as indicative of how a ‘benchmark’ could be set for other providers. Mr Beacom of the *Belfast Telegraph* argued that the complex surrounding, with retail and other opportunities, could all be part of a new spectator experience: ‘If you build it they will come.’ This would make it a ‘family’ affair, Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA concurred.

Mr Wells described the new stadium as part of a ‘statement’ by the IFA—a statement ‘that we want to modernise’. He pointed to the success of the Odyssey and the rising expectations of the coming generation. He saw the advantages of three codes sharing the same venue for social ‘integration’. He said: ‘I think it will break down a lot of sensitivities and barriers.’ There was also a great potential via the new stadium to obtain the data needed to get tens of thousands of Northern Ireland fans online.



While the new stadium offers a huge opportunity to meet the 1996 Sports Council criterion of venue neutrality, this cannot be entirely achieved for as long as *God Save the Queen* is played at Northern Ireland games. Since this is not the case at games involving Scotland and Wales, it cannot be said to represent a mere affirmation of ‘national’ affiliation but carries sectarian connotations in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells said: ‘If something is offensive we should consider removing it. We shouldn’t cling on to things just because they were there.’ He said there was a need to respect differences of opinion on the issue and he added: ‘I’m not wedded to the principle of playing it, come hell or high water.’

Two alternatives were suggested during the research. One was the devising of a new and specific song: one interviewee suggested we needed an equivalent of ‘Flower of Scotland’ and another pointed to how the Irish Rugby Football Union had addressed the equivalent problem with the republic’s anthem. The second was the elimination of national anthems entirely—as one Northern Ireland supporter suggested, because of their ‘divisive’ character (though this would breach current FIFA requirements). He noted how at the Northern Ireland under-19 game in Newry there were kids with not only Northern Ireland but also GAA and Celtic tops; why should they be ‘forced to sing?’, he asked. While this was the trend of views interviewees expressed, one interviewee who very much favoured the new stadium did, however, feel the Queen should continue to be played.

What difference would this make? The academic and former Cliftonville footballer David Hassan (2005: 138) contends that replacement of *God Save the Queen* would be ‘a welcome and magnanimous gesture’ and he writes:

It would unquestionably do much to convince Catholics about the degree of change that has taken place within the country’s soccer administration in recent years. A commitment to making this change, coupled with an improvement in the team’s fortunes on the pitch, could well persuade Catholics in Northern Ireland to assume a greater interest in the affairs of the country’s international side.

These are not challenges which the IFA faces in isolation. Because Northern Ireland is not a conventional ‘nation-state’—though in an age of globalisation and mass migration, the challenges of interculturalism in Northern Ireland appear leading-age rather than backward-looking—other institutions which play a key public, symbolic role have had to face them too.

The assembly, while in being, devised a civic-minded logo based on the flax flower. And the PSNI, stemming from a competition sponsored by the *Belfast Telegraph*, agreed a cap badge which incorporated a range of symbols. And one interviewee, unimpressed by the ‘diddy-dee’ song imposed by the Irish Rugby Football Union, favoured such a public competition to engender a more widely acceptable anthem than *God Save the Queen*. The ultimate decision, of course, would remain for the IFA to make, as and when it felt such an anthem had been generated: there would be little point in simply swapping one alienation for another.

Given the modesty of DCAL’s commitments in the *A Shared Future* policy framework, it is unlikely the IFA can expect much leadership from government in this regard. Mr Mee of DCAL said: ‘I don’t think we would want to define neutrality.’

## 7.12 Wider connections

The historical backdrop to the efforts of the IFA to make football more inclusive in Northern Ireland is of course partly defined by the split with the FAI. The governing bodies of most other games of British origin in Ireland were similarly established before partition, in the latter part of the 19th century: tennis (1877), rugby (1879), golf (1891) and hockey. But unlike football, these sports remained all-Ireland in governance arrangements (Bairner, 2005b).

Several interviewees thought the north-south Setanta Cup an important and valuable innovation in this regard. The chief executive of the Football Association of Ireland, John Delaney, described it as ‘a wonderful success’. It had helped relationships at all levels of the game, from the administrative to the players. He felt relations between the two associations on the island were now ‘very good’—though there are continuing tensions over the fate of Northern Ireland-based international players—and that relations between clubs had been ‘hugely and significantly improved’. Mr News of the Sports Council noted how relations between fans had also been good and policing had been normal.

Mr Delaney foresaw the possibility of incremental additions to the Setanta competition, on which there is a four-year agreement with the sports broadcaster, though he thought it too early to talk of an all-Ireland league. He also saw the potential of the new stadium for cup games.

The Scottish Executive has taken the issue of sectarianism in sport seriously since devolution in 1999. Later this year, legislation is expected to come before the Scottish Parliament introducing banning orders for fans guilty of violence and sectarianism. The justice minister, Cathy Jamieson, said she hoped this would ‘help us turn the tide on the bigots’. Similar orders were introduced in England and Wales in 2000 (BBC Online, June 3rd 2005).

In 2001, the Scottish Executive had set up a cross-party group to explore whether new legislation was needed to tackle religious hatred in Scotland. Its recommendations (available at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)) included proposing that the Scottish FA make it a condition of club licences that the club has not only policy against sectarian behaviour but also that steps are ‘vigorously’ taken to enforce it at matches, including exclusions and confiscation of season tickets as necessary. Clubs would be required to report to the FA on their performance in this regard and failure to comply would lead to loss of their licence. These proposals underscore the views expressed in the interview reported above with the Irish Premier League secretary.

Bairner (2005a: 3) makes the point that ‘there has been a tendency to become fixated on Northern Ireland’s uniqueness instead of considering the issues raised by this problematic society in a more global context’. The work of the IFA has been welcomed on the European football stage, where UEFA is concerned about the phenomenon of racism in the stands as players become more mobile and thus teams more diverse. A recent news piece on the UEFA website (May 25th 2005), based on an interview with the community-relations officer, began: ‘UEFA’s national associations are making their own significant contributions to the movement to eliminate racism, discrimination and intolerance from football—with the Irish Football Association (IFA) in Northern Ireland a fine example of the work being undertaken.’

UEFA has certainly been willing to give the Football for All campaign strong financial backing. Taking into account the magnitude of the problem and the quality of the programme, it has, in addition to the 50,000 Swiss francs it offers to each association to tackle racism in the game, provided significant additional funding from a separate budget line (5 x £20,000 over the seasons 2002-07). Pointing out that half the affiliates had not yet sought to draw down this money (to which they must supply matching funding), Patrick Gasser of UEFA said that ‘sectarianism certainly poses a big challenge for the IFA, and it is good to see an association that takes the problem seriously and tackles the challenge’. Even from Geneva, however, he could observe: ‘Michael drives this.’

## 7.12 Future for campaign

Interviewees generally endorsed the broad nature of Football for All and, if anything, would want to see that developed further. This is against a backdrop of substantial need in terms of people with disabilities. Disability Sport (2005) complains: ‘Although since 2003 funding for disability sport by Sports Council Northern Ireland has improved quite dramatically, investment in physical activity and sports opportunities for people with disabilities by government agencies as a whole remains at an extremely low level, particularly when compared to other nations.’

Mr Crooks’ own work has clearly broadened well beyond its initial focus on learning disability. One of Mr Crooks’ goals as disability officer is to see structured programmes guaranteeing ‘performance pathways’ for each strand of disability.

Kevin O’Neill of Disability Sport pointed to the flip-side of the success of the campaign at internationals when he said there was a problem across the sport of the ‘dominance of the community-relations issue’. He said there was still lower participation by people with disabilities in football than in other sports, so there remains plenty of work to do. Mr McCladdery of Disability Action said it had been right to focus on sectarianism in the early stages but the campaign ‘could and should be broadened out’.

This is equally against a backdrop of substantial demand in terms of women’s soccer. This year’s European championships in England are bound to enhance that demand, already identified by the soccer strategy Advisory Panel (2001: 47): ‘Women’s football is one of the fastest growing sports in the world and women’s football in Northern Ireland reflects that trend.’ The coaching director, Mr Millar, felt the campaign was still ‘scratching the surface’ in this regard.

Mr Boyd wanted to see more stress on racism, which he contended was ‘getting worse and worse’ in the wider society. The development officer, Mr Stewart, said there was a specific need to involve the largest ethnic minority, the Chinese community, more: he noted how Chinese youngsters weren’t turning up to fun weeks.

Like many others (see above), Mr Boyd also saw the need to do more with the Irish League, especially in the arena of stewarding and safety. The women’s officer said: ‘Don’t change it if it’s not broken’ but also advocated ‘filtering down’ the message into the clubs.

Ms Booth, and in this she was echoed by Mr McClean of Dungoyne Boys, wanted to see more emphasis on going into the schools, linking Football for All not only to citizenship education but also health messages. There is huge potential for curricular materials developed by the campaign to be presented to successive cohorts of young people right across Northern Ireland, with the resources of human capital coming from teaching staff themselves rather than the IFA. And the earlier comments about clubs reinventing themselves as community hubs point the way to education and health links.

Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA felt the campaign in the future should be less ‘event driven’. She wanted to see more emphasis on the hard grind of putting in place policies and procedures. In terms of youth development, for example, there needed to be an awareness among the grassroots development officers that girls felt intimidated by boys in mixed sessions.



These comments are important because they indicate that there will never be a point when the Football for All campaign can be said to have ‘succeeded’ and be due to be wound up; indeed, paradoxically, the more it raises consciousness the more challenges are revealed. Were it the case that the only task were to clean up the environment at Windsor Park, progressing winding up would be quite feasible. But the chief executive, Mr Wells, said: ‘I can’t see a time when the IFA doesn’t see this as an integral part of its work.’ He recognised in this light that dependence on project-based funding was not sustainable.

For example, Mr News of the Sports Council pointed out, coaching badges need regularly to be renewed and up-to-date courses keep needing to be developed. Conversely, there is however the potential of cumulative progress. The Irish Premier League secretary, Mr McVeigh, said that as a result of the campaign ‘We will find ourselves in a position of strength, rather than a position of weakness, in the mid- to long-term.’

A number of interviewees highlighted opportunities to develop the campaign in collaboration with colleagues across the island—which need not be at the expense of, for example, learning from the Scottish experience. Mr O’Neill of Disability Sport, for example, pointed to the all-Ireland nature of most disabled sports in terms of competitions, and both he and Mr Smyth of the CBI talked of the economies of scale that were made possible by north-south co-operation.

**7.13 Structure of campaign**

The campaign currently operates through an advisory panel which embraces IFA officers and representatives of partner organisations. But one interviewee said this was not working: there was a tendency to assume it was ‘Michael’s project’ and that he should keep on doing what he was doing already, rather than the committee driving it forward. It would be helpful if the community-relations officer was principally responsible for servicing the committee but that it was chaired by the chair or chief executive of the IFA, as an indication of its importance for the organisation. The panel chair should then ensure that other senior IFA staff attended as necessary, depending on the agenda of the meeting.

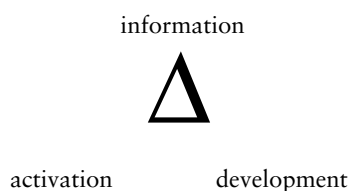
The view also emerged during the interviews that membership of the advisory panel could be broadened to include additional stakeholders. Ms Bunt of the Sports Council, one of its members, felt it was too dominated by IFA personnel. The aim should be to ensure that no key stakeholder is left out; rather, that involvement in the running of the campaign is a means to expand a sense of ownership over it, reducing the dependence on Mr Boyd. Indeed, since the community-relations officer could at any time decide to move on, it is imperative that the campaign become sufficiently embedded in the work of the IFA as a whole and the network with other organisations becomes sufficiently secure to ensure that such an eventuality can be handled if and when it comes.

Mr Rainey of the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs said the association had to decide to ‘really commit themselves to it’. That needed to be reflected, he said, in commitment from members of the ruling body voted on by the clubs, to ensure they were brought on board.

Mr Boyd currently reports to the chief executive directly on his work from day to day. There is, however, some dissonance because the disability and women’s officers report to the coaching director. And while these two officers are (quite justifiably) being allocated an additional staff member each, one interviewee expressed concern that there was no one other than Mr Boyd in the IFA who was ‘championing community relations’.

This tension was reflected in different views expressed by the director of coaching and the chief executive on where Football for All was best placed in the organisation. Mr Wells made the case that it was ‘part and parcel of a much bigger brand marketing issue’ and so should fall in marketing/communications, whereas the head of coaching, Mr Millar, saw it in terms of development and therefore naturally located in that department, though he stressed he took a relaxed view.

What this research has suggested is that in a sense both are right and that Football for All is about a combination of information, activation and development:



Information feeds into development work by, for example, the Football for All modules on community relations and disability in the coaching licences. It feeds into activation by work with, for example, the supporters’ clubs on fan behaviour. Development feeds into activation by bringing through successive cohorts of young people with an involvement in the sport, a minority of whom can be persuaded to become active in promoting the campaign. And it feeds into information through providing key

demographic data on who those cohorts are and the gaps that need to be filled. Finally, activation feeds into information by supplying the IFA with practical ideas, grounded in experience, on how the campaign can be progressed. And it feeds into development by ensuring there is the voluntary commitment to expanding involvement among hitherto under-represented groups going way beyond the efforts of the 16 new paid FDC directors.

The women's officer, Ms Booth, perhaps put it best when she argued that Football for All needed to be 'integral to the whole working of the association', as an 'overarching principle' that 'has to be in every policy or programme we deliver'. The chief executive, Mr Wells, himself echoed this view: 'We need to see it as an integrated part of our overall strategy.' He pointed to the 'synergy' between the community-relations work with coaches and the work of the disability officer, for example. And the coaching director, Mr Millar, said: 'I see it as part of everything that we do.'

From the outside, Mr News of the Sports Council agreed: it was important (as with the coaching modules, for example) to get across that 'this is everybody's concern'. Mr Lawlor of Cliftonville FC did too: 'It's got to be their key driver.' Like other interviewees, he used the word 'modernisation' to link the campaign to the future of the association and football in the region as a whole. And, from government, while Mr Mee of DCAL expressed some uncertainty as to 'how core the work is to what the IFA does', on the principle he was clear: 'It should be a core area of work.'

This implies the existing FFA team remaining together as a unit, and - crucially - *as a unit on which all the departments depend and to which they all contribute*. The development officer, Mr Stewart, stressed this holistic approach: 'It's the whole thing. We've got to get away in here from "that's that department" and never the twain shall meet.' It is also clear from this research and the moves in train to enlarge the team that this will have to be an expanding unit, whose importance to the association will continue to grow, rather than diminish.

## **7.14 Funding of campaign**

A bid for renewed funding for the campaign is being submitted to the EU 'Peace II+' extension, and lottery funding has also been sought. But it is critical, in terms of both the commitment of DCAL and the IFA, that money from the soccer strategy pot be allocated to the campaign, both to recognise its centrality and to ensure its sustainability.

The Irish Premier League secretary, Mr McVeigh, said it was a 'prerequisite' that some of the money to be allocated to the association for the soccer strategy be used for the Football for All campaign. The anti-racism trainer, Mr White, said the IFA would 'send a message' that it was 'serious' by being 'proactive' in seeking financial support for the campaign. Ms Bunt of the Sports Council agreed: regardless of support from UEFA or elsewhere, the IFA should be looking to 'invest' in this campaign if it was indeed 'integral' to its work. And Mr Lawlor of Cliftonville FC said: 'The IFA needs to stump up and show their commitment once and for all.'

Ms Muldoon of the NIWFA made a similar point in terms of the development of women's football specifically. Success was only possible, she stressed, if a certain proportion of the association's budget was 'dedicated' to women's football: she pointed to a FIFA recommendation of 10 per cent in this regard.

The development officer, Mr Stewart, was clear that more resources needed to be injected into the campaign: 'One person can't do it.' He contrasted the existing resources devoted to the campaign with the extensive community- and public-relations staff employed by the German FA, as he had found in his dealings with it. Around the recent game with Germany, the association had been able to organise activities with Northern Ireland youngsters, he said, including basic education about the country. Mr Stewart argued for the employment of a development officer for the campaign, to assist Mr Boyd (which would match the duplication of staff *vis-à-vis* the disability and women's officers).

## 8. The fans

### 8.1 Background

If the Football for All campaign is to enhance involvement in the sport among historically under-represented groups, there must be evidence of a substantial gap between those who currently watch or participate in the game, at whatever level, in Northern Ireland, and those who might be persuaded by the campaign to do so. While we do not have data on participation in this regard, we do have very strong evidence of latent interest in football support.

Survey research commissioned by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2003 and 2004 identified the profile of the 'regular fan' and the 'armchair fan'—the former being a regular attendee at Irish League games, the latter someone whose interest in the game was based on watching it on TV. While 38 per cent of the population were interested in soccer, only 3 per cent fell into the former category, leaving 35 per cent in the latter (DCAL, 2004: 6). This suggests that the game is currently only attracting a fraction of its potential support: attendance at Irish League games would double, for instance, if only one in 12 armchair fans could be persuaded to attend.

This conclusion is reinforced by opinion research by Millward Brown Ulster (2005), which carries out a 1000+ Omnibus survey every two months across Northern Ireland. Against a trend of declining interest in several sports by comparison with previous surveys in 1997 and 1984, the 2005 survey showed interest in soccer stable at 34 per cent. By comparison, only snooker (24 per cent and on a downward trend), rugby (21 per cent, not previously assessed) and Gaelic football (19 per cent and rising) engaged the interest of more than 15 per cent of respondents. And while snooker lacks the health benefits (and is associated with some dis-benefits) of exercise sports, interest in rugby and Gaelic games are limited by social class and religion respectively.

Earlier research commissioned by DCAL in the context of the emerging soccer strategy, based on the views of 'stakeholders' in the game, notably found (DCAL, 2001: 8): 'There is a lot of feeling, fervour and passion about football in Northern Ireland. Tapping into and harnessing this energy will be key to progressing football in the future.' If the Football for All campaign is targeting the right social groups, then it can play a leading role in doing so.

The demographic contrast between regular and armchair fans bears this out. While 38 per cent of armchair fans were identified as being Catholic, that was only true of 17 per cent of regular Irish League fans and just 6 per cent of regular Northern Ireland international fans. And while 17 per cent of armchair fans were female (a proportion itself likely to increase rapidly in the coming years), this was true of only 7 per cent of Irish League fans and just 4 per cent of attendees at internationals (DCAL, 2004).

It would be foolish to conclude that simply encouraging more Catholics and women to attend games would solve the problems Irish League clubs in particular face. The main explanations given for non-attendance were lack of interest in the Irish League and the poor standard of play. And the biggest single factor volunteered by armchair fans (59 per cent) as 'very important' to encourage attendance was improving the standard. But nearly half in each case did say it was 'very important' variously to reduce 'bad language' (46 per cent), to make the environment more 'family-friendly' (45 per cent), to improve toilet and seating facilities (41 per cent), to reduce sectarianism (43 per cent) and to reduce racism (38 per cent).

Addressing the first three of these concerns would certainly help in encouraging attendance by women, who comprise 20 per cent of fans at Premier League games in England (DCAL, 2004: 22), where greater progress has been made in these regards. Addressing the latter two would correspondingly encourage more Catholics and members of ethnic minorities to attend. For example, 15 per cent of Catholic armchair fans gave sectarianism as their reason for not attending Irish League games more often.

This bore out the concern recorded in the DCAL (2001: 30-31) stakeholders' survey, which found that 'the supporters of clubs which would be perceived to be Catholic considered that sectarianism was the main issue in Northern Ireland. They reported that they felt uncomfortable and unsafe when attending international matches and some senior fixtures and that this deterred them from attending more often.' Eighty-three per cent of 'perceived Catholic' clubs which responded to that survey considered sectarianism had 'a lot' of impact on attendance at internationals and 56 per cent took the same view *vis-à-vis* Irish League games. More positively, 67 per cent of 'perceived Protestant' and 93 per cent of 'perceived Catholic' clubs 'strongly agreed' with the statement that more should be done to promote good community relations in football.

At international level, it is true that many Catholics have come to support the Republic of Ireland team in recent decades, because they have been alienated by sectarian manifestations at Windsor Park, because the republic offers expression of a wider sense of 'Irishness' in a non-antagonistic context and/or because of the team's rising FIFA ranking (Hassan, 2005; Fulton, 2005). But the first of these is reversible over the long term, the second need not be incompatible with an interest in Northern Ireland's fortunes as well and the third is up to the Northern Ireland manager to address.

Twenty-seven per cent of Catholic armchair fans gave ‘bigotry/sectarianism’ as a reason for not attending Northern Ireland games, and the combination of the Football for All campaign and the move to a new stadium could be important in wooing these supporters, given the ‘baggage’ identified as associated with Windsor Park. High-quality facilities should also make a significant difference to the willingness of female and disabled supporters to attend.

## 8.2 Roles of the fans

The impact of the Football for All campaign, as seen from the stands, and the roles fans play in it were explored in two focus groups. One was drawn from Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs and took place courtesy of the IFA, while the other comprised supporters of Cliftonville FC and took place in premises kindly offered by the club. Members are hereafter identified by first names.

The Northern Ireland fans testified to the radical nature of the change in the environment at international games. ‘The atmosphere bears no comparison to what we would have had in the dark old days,’ said Stewart. ‘The infamous Lennon evening was a bit of a watershed.’

The most interesting idea to emerge from this research was captured in the phrase ‘self-policing’. It became clear that the biggest single achievement of the Football for All campaign—the change at internationals—had been stimulated directly by the campaign but had been activated by supporters themselves. It was the capacity of supporters, organised into clubs, to police their own behaviour, and those of the errant minority, which emerged as absolutely critical to success.

One of the first actions by the community-relations officer, Mr Boyd, following his appointment was to arrange a meeting with officers of the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs. He admitted to some trepidation in advance of that engagement but by inviting the supporters themselves to come up with ideas as to how the well-adverted problems associated with Windsor Park could be addressed, they were brought onside and themselves acquired a sense of ownership of the campaign.

There has been similar success in Scotland in recent years, in terms of the culture of drink-related misbehaviour which had been associated with international games. Mr Gilmour of the Scottish Executive said that the ‘Tartan Army’ had come to ‘self-police’ its behaviour and he saw the next step as taking that to the level of club games. An action plan is being developed in the wake of the summit on sectarianism and Mr Gilmour said the executive wanted supporters ‘to feel involved and have some ownership’ over it.

Fascinatingly, this idea of activating supporters to deliver the Football for All Campaign, which has emerged from experience, is in line with some of the most advanced recent thinking in the arena of public-service delivery. This is the notion, developed by a London think tank, the New Economics Foundation (see [www.neweconomics.org/gen/z\\_sys\\_PublicationDetail.aspx?PID=188](http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/z_sys_PublicationDetail.aspx?PID=188)), of ‘co-production’.

That is to say, instead of, as conventionally assumed, public goods being achieved by services being ‘delivered’ to passive ‘clients’, the goal is to stimulate citizens to play an active role themselves. For example, the recent 20-year plan from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2004: 45, 49-51) identifies the potential for voluntary organisations to take responsibility for some services currently supplied by the state, and for individuals to become involved in self-management of chronic conditions.

What this means in practice is very simple. The Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs block-books 600 adjacent seats in the Kop at Windsor Park for internationals. A number of non-sectarian chants have been developed and publicised, and if anyone in the crowd starts up a sectarian song officers of the amalgamation, armed with a megaphone, strike up a non-sectarian alternative which quickly drowns it out. The one remaining intractable is the pause in *God Save the Queen* during which someone can get ‘No Surrender’ in edgeways if so determined.

If that has changed the sound, the ‘Sea of Green’ initiative has changed the image, weaning fans away from attiring themselves in red, white and blue. Nigel from the Northern Ireland fans’ group said the broader constituency of fans being attracted to games were now ‘supporting the team’, rather than ‘supporting an identity’.

The impact of the campaign has not only been felt in the stands. It has also been associated with a dramatic growth in the number of Northern Ireland supporters’ clubs. These have expanded from about half a dozen in the late 1990s to around 40 today. New clubs are informed about the Football for All campaign and the supporters’ code of conduct by the amalgamation.

It is interesting to consider why the Northern Ireland fans should have been so apparently willing to embrace change. One factor may be that, instead of feeling shamed by sectarian or racist behaviour, supporters can now bask in some reflected media glow. Jonathan said fans felt ‘a sense of pride in it’. He now felt comfortable about talking in his workplace about being a Northern Ireland supporter.

Mr Watson of BBC Northern Ireland said: 'I actually think the fans have seen a benefit.' Now they are getting filmed and photographed and 'getting plaudits for being well behaved'. Mr Beacom of the *Belfast Telegraph* said that David Beckham had 'waxed lyrical about Northern Ireland fans', describing them as 'some of the best he had ever played in front of' when he had spoken to him at the international at Old Trafford.

The supporters' code of conduct for international games, which has been reproduced in match programmes, is a positive development but interviewees tended to see it as peripheral to most fans' attention. An interesting innovation in this regard is the simple leaflet produced by the 'Spirit of 82' Northern Ireland Supporters' Club, which gives the code more purchase.

The Spirit of 82 adapted version of the code refers to conduct while travelling with the club and attending club functions, as well as attending matches. It makes clear what is required of members, for example in refraining from 'sectarian language, displaying sectarian or racist emblems' and from 'singing sectarian or racist songs or chants'. This leaflet is not only something which can be placed by club officers in the hands of members but also carries the sanction that members in breach are liable to be barred from the club.

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of supporters taking ownership of the Football for All campaign. The effect of the professional role of the IFA staff team can be multiplied several times by the voluntary activism of supporters. The anti-racism trainer, Mr White, told of how he had been encouraged by coming across a 13-year-old Glentoran supporter who wanted to know what he could do about racism.

The potential is there to cascade down into the clubs the experience of the amalgamation at international level. Cliftonville FC has a code of conduct for supporters, requiring for example (as emblazoned above the entrance) that only club colours be displayed. Interestingly, Mr Lawlor said exactly the same approach had been adopted to deal with fans engaging in sectarian chants at Solitude as that at Windsor by the amalgamation. There were a good group of supporters, he said, 'who have drums and trumpets and that and would drown them out'.

The predominantly Catholic group of Cliftonville fans provided a foil to the predominantly Protestant group of Northern Ireland fans. In the latter, Lawrence wondered whether 'a bubble' had been created at Windsor Park *vis-à-vis* the internationals. In the former, one contrasted the spectacle in the Botanic Inn on the day of the Old Trafford game, with The Billy Boys being sung in front of BBC TV cameras on the ground floor—it was vicious—while Republic of Ireland fans were creating a carnival atmosphere upstairs.

Among the Cliftonville fans, there were mixed views and a lot of ambivalence about Northern Ireland. Simon said that in these 'new times', if the team were more successful, he might go to an international game. But Cormac said Northern Ireland had become too polarised: 'there's no in-between any more'. David also referred to the 'carnival' atmosphere surrounding the republic's games and it was clear none of the group had attended a Northern Ireland international since the early 80s—when, as Cormac put it, he felt like he was 'surrounded by C company [of the UDA]'. This in a way dovetailed with the view in the Northern Ireland fans' group that the achievements of the campaign so far—which, if it has achieved anything, has been to engender such an atmosphere at the internationals—could be further highlighted.

### 8.3 The future

The focus groups indicated there was still work to be done in clarifying what the campaign overall is about. In the Cliftonville fans' group, David said: 'I don't know what the Football for All campaign is trying to achieve.' This was particularly so, he said, when the IFA maintained a 'sectarian rule' in its rulebook which appeared to countermand it. Simon said that to him Football for All 'means all players, all supporters, altogether having an equal say'.

In the Northern Ireland fans' group, Stewart similarly said there was a need for a message saying 'this is what it means'. In the absence of that, some Northern Ireland fans saw the campaign as about 'appeasing' or 'watering down', he said. He felt it should be understood as 'leaving the politics at the turnstiles'. This met the challenge from Stephen: 'Do you want it to be for the tolerant *and* the bigots?' To which Stewart responded that it should be about ensuring that anyone who wanted to support Northern Ireland could do so in an atmosphere 'free from bigotry'. Stephen in turn doubted whether it was possible to take politics out of international football, given Northern Ireland was a 'deeply sectarian' society.

These exchanges are worth reporting because they capture how the Football for All message might be clarified, bearing in mind the challenge of offering a message that can be consistent for the various publics—for participants and supporters, and the variety of historically under-represented constituencies. One simple way of articulating the aim of Football for All is an environment in which every individual can feel *free* to become involved in the sport, on a basis of *equality*, and confident they will be *secure* if they do so.

‘Freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘security’ are universal values which can be widely endorsed. One way or another, the absence of one or more of them—or, at least, the perceived absence of one or more of them—is what defines the barriers limiting involvement in the sport hitherto. Defining the aim of Football for All in this way thus chimes with the association’s oft-repeated aspiration to make football ‘the most popular and inclusive sport in Northern Ireland’.

Clear objectives are critical to answer the question posed by Stephen: ‘When and how will you know if it’s a success?’ Such objectives can flow clearly from the aim and themselves set the framework for activities pursued, so that these are not just *ad hoc* but add up to an integrated programme greater than the sum of its parts. This can all be worked up into a strategy to which the IFA can formally be committed—a commitment which it can publicise at every opportunity.

The new stadium was welcomed in this regard by the Northern Ireland fans’ group. Ricky pointed out that those who were described by the group as ‘the belligerents’ would no longer ‘be sure who they are standing beside’. That is to say, in a more neutral environment they wouldn’t be able to assume a sectarian sub-culture. Stephen saw it as a possibility for a ‘fresh start’. From the Cliftonville fans’ group, Simon concurred. While there was ‘not a mission’ of him going to Windsor Park, the new stadium was ‘a good thing’ and it would get more people ‘from the other side’ going to see Northern Ireland, he said.

Ricky argued that one way in which this fresh start could be made would be the introduction of CCTV and proper stewarding. This would be a way, said Jonathan, to ensure that the code of conduct was enforced. Lawrence said he would be willing to pay a little extra for tickets if better stewarding required it. Stewart said there had to be a reward or a penalty for certain behaviours: ‘Those who are belligerent need to know there will be a penalty that will be enforced.’

Stewarding is, of course, the other side of ‘self-policing’ and key to its success. In the Cliftonville fans’ group, Simon described stewarding at Irish League games as ‘shocking’. He gave the instance of how a sectarian clash had taken place with Portadown fans after a Shamrock Park game, which he claimed could have been prevented if stewards had stopped home fans leaving early and awaiting the away team’s fans’ departure.

Cormac pointed to the problem of stewards watching the game rather than watching the fans. And John highlighted the difficulty, in the absence of a clear line between stewards and fans, of stewards tackling an individual whom they knew who had, say, thrown a bottle. John described clubs’ efforts as token: ‘They just stick yellow coats on them.’ These comments bore out those made above by Mr McVeigh of the Irish Premier League on the need for a more professional approach by clubs.

There was also consensus on the need for the Sunday ban to go. In the Northern Ireland fans’ group, Stewart described the recent decision to retain the ban as ‘a blow to Football for All’. Stephen said it was ‘a penalty kick to the opposition’.

In the Cliftonville fans’ group, this was one of a number of issues highlighted placing the credibility of the association in doubt. David complained of an absence of Catholics in the ‘hierarchy’ of the IFA, before listing a succession of recent ‘crises’, including the collapse of Omagh Town and Coleraine, the Glentoran/Linfield riot, problems over player registration at Larne, the auditing issues delaying the £8 million injection, uninsured international players and the exhaustion of funding for the youth development officer programme (which the FDCs will replace).

It was clear that the chief executive will play a critical role in how the association is perceived in that regard, and this particular jury remained out. Simon asked whether Mr Wells would ‘shake it up’. David claimed that he had ‘done nothing but talk’.

There was also a consensus that the clubs were the next challenge. In the Northern Ireland fans’ group, Stewart said the Irish League had been ‘neglected’ in terms of the campaign so far. Stephen liked the idea of club licences being a lever to say ‘you must do A, B and C’. He suggested that each licensed club could be required to have a Football for All co-ordinator. Club audits could indicate what clubs had done and what they hoped to achieve, and for which the help of the IFA could be sought.

## 9. Conclusions

The IFA's 2003 development plan said that by 2007 it aimed to ensure that football 'will be the most popular and inclusive sport in Northern Ireland'. Genuine progress has certainly been made but this research has indicated that much remains to be done.

Despite the low response rate to the questionnaire, the data it generated indicated gaps to be filled by the campaign as well as providing a benchmark against which future progress can be measured. It should be reissued periodically, say on a three-year cycle, with an accompanying letter from the IFA chief executive indicating its importance to the organisation. Meantime, the association should progressively ensure all contacts have an identified e-mail address and can receive grouped e-mailings (eg to all registered coaches). The data collected should then be compared against those indicated above and detailed in appendix A.

The campaign has been a very real success in terms of transforming the atmosphere at internationals at Windsor Park. But the new stadium envisaged at the Maze offers a major opportunity for a fresh start, promoting not just anti-sectarian and anti-racist messages but also facilities which encourage in particular the attendance of women and people with disabilities. The IFA should consider in this regard the idea of a public competition to see if a more widely acceptable anthem can be found to the playing of *God Save the Queen* at internationals, in line with practice in Scotland and Wales.

Real growth can be attested to in women's football and football for people with disabilities, associated with the campaign. The campaign message needs to be more broadly transmitted to reflect that, with the assistance of the marketing/communications department, rather than this being dependent entirely on the community-relations officer. The need to integrate the campaign into every aspect of what the IFA does is a key conclusion arising from this research.

Substantial progress remains to be made at the level of Irish League clubs. But this should be facilitated by the merger between the IFA and the IPL. The prospective club licensing system offers the opportunity to lever change at club level, particularly vis-à-vis stewarding (with its critical role in terms of racist and sectarian behaviour) and facilities (with their key importance in terms of attracting more women to the game and making grounds accessible to people with disabilities).

The new Irish League Supporters' Association should be seen as a vehicle to extend the principle of the 'co-production' of the campaign from the internationals to the clubs, replicating the role played by the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs. Each club should designate a Football for All co-ordinator to act as an interlocutor at that level. And encouragement should be given to the efforts of Donegal Celtic to bring back senior football to west Belfast.

Radical ideas such as ground-sharing may be needed to ensure viability and this can be linked to a reconciliation agenda. The way ahead for clubs is a deeper community embeddedness, and the IFA should organise a workshop with a representative of Supporters Direct about the role of supporters' trusts in this regard. On a wider canvass, the IFA and the FAI should jointly promote the incremental growth of the Setanta Cup.

Linking Football for All to day-to-day IFA activities, as in the training of coaches and referees, is a good way of ensuring that the message is not seen as peripheral or of marginal importance. The IFA needs to recognise that the ban on Sunday games represents an impediment in this regard and is arguably unsustainable.

Players also have a role to play in promoting the Football for All campaign, and star players have been used to that effect in internationals. But engaging players systematically will depend on establishing a players' association; the IFA should try to identify with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions a union which would take such an association under its wing.

Grassroots development, with the new Football Development Centres shortly to come on stream, offers an opportunity to widen the net of the Football for All campaign and take it more deeply into the grassroots. This will require stringent reporting of data by the grassroots development officers to the IFA on the numbers and type of participants in their programmes. The interest of Derry City FC in potentially acting as a base for an FDC in the city should be pursued further, particularly given the bridges that might build.

Government could also do more to combat intolerance in sport. Ministers should emulate the 'hands-on' approach of their Scottish counterparts in championing this cause. The Football Offences Act should be extended to Northern Ireland and government should liaise with the Scottish Executive on prospective Scottish legislative developments in this regard. This can be linked with the wider *A Shared Future* policy framework.

Football for All is not a short-term campaign to clean up Windsor Park. Even if that was its origin, it has not only developed well beyond that but there is scope for further expansion. Interestingly, it may also be a key to the broader modernisation of the association.

This has implications for where the campaign sits. It should operate as a discrete and, as resources allow, expanding unit of the association, reporting directly to the chief executive, rather than coming under one or other existing department. The broader advisory panel running the campaign should be chaired by the IFA chair or chief executive, and the participation of external stakeholders enhanced—for example, Irish League clubs which took their responsibilities seriously could be added. A priority should be to employ an assistant to Mr Boyd, to pursue the work with clubs and the grassroots development officers.

Funding for the campaign has hitherto been dependent on support from the EU ‘Peace II’ programme and UEFA. If Football for All is indeed to be integral to the future role of the association, interviewees identified the need for it to receive sustained funding. A proportion of the money from the soccer strategy should be allocated to this purpose. Examining funding is also a way to make priorities clear: following the FIFA recommendation of ensuring at least 10 per cent of associations’ budgets was allocated to women’s football specifically would ensure it was taken seriously.

Conversely, the success of the campaign, allied to internal commitment to it, should lead to continued or enhanced support from external sources. There is a wider argument here about the failure of the government to promise new funding under the *A Shared Future* for community relations, but there would be potential in that context for an application for core funding to the Community Relations Council (currently the programme has little more than £3 million per year to disburse).

The most significant conclusion to draw from this research is arguably *vis-à-vis* the role of fans. In line with advanced thinking on issues of governance in modern societies—in particular the notion of ‘co-production’ of public goods—the campaign has sought to activate fans, so that they take ownership over it and acquire the capacity to engage in ‘self-policing’.

This has represented a major innovation in community-relations practice in Northern Ireland, which has wide implications for how the goal of a normal, civic society identified in *A Shared Future* can best be pursued. In particular, it highlights how the expertise of voluntary associations, and the idealism of voluntary effort, can realise achievements that government alone can not.

There is scope for clarifying the aim of Football for All, looking to the future. One simple way of articulating it is an environment in which every individual can feel *free* to become involved in the sport, on a basis of *equality*, and confident they will be *secure* if they do so. This aim can then be translated into consequent objectives, to which projects or activities capable of measurement or qualitative evaluation can be attached. These will all add up to a cogent and persuasive strategy—the elements of which are already largely available in existing documentation—which the IFA should work up and to which its executive committee should be committed. That commitment in turn should be repeatedly publicised and acted upon.

Reasonable concerns have been raised by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure about the adequacy of data to underpin evaluation of the campaign. This research has begun to redress that inadequacy, and pointed to how remaining quantitative gaps can be filled. The IFA should engage in early dialogue with DCAL to sort this out.

But government also has a major role here. Not only because of the campaign’s potential to secure public goods in terms of football but also because of the lessons it is generating for good practice elsewhere, government needs to put its shoulder behind this campaign. That commitment will itself be measurable—in legislative, political and financial terms.



## 10. Recommendations

1. The aim of Football for All should be defined as: engendering an environment in which every individual can feel *free* to become involved in the sport, on a basis of *equality*, and confident they will be *secure* if they do so.
2. This aim should be translated into consequent objectives, to which projects or activities capable of measurement or qualitative evaluation to assess continuing impact can be attached.
3. This should all be worked up into a cogent strategy for Football for All to which the IFA executive committee should be committed. That commitment should be repeatedly publicised and acted upon.
4. The full breadth of the Football for All campaign, not just its (critical) community-relations aspect, should be systematically communicated by the association. This should also be reflected in the funding of the campaign, in particular in line with the FIFA benchmark (10 per cent of association budget) on women's football.
5. Building on the major achievement of the campaign in transforming the atmosphere at internationals, the proposed new stadium heralds a fresh start. The IFA should consider a public competition to see if a more widely acceptable anthem can be found to the playing of *God Save the Queen*, in line with practice in Scotland and Wales.
6. The merger between the IFA and the Irish Premier League creates the opportunity to move on to tackling the challenges more systematically in the league. The envisaged club licensing system should be used to lever change at clubs, such as in improved facilities and stewarding.
7. The potential of the 'co-production' of the campaign by fans, so effective at internationals, should be extended throughout the league via the new Irish League Supporters' Association.
8. The prospect of a referee development officer, arising from the soccer strategy, should be utilised to integrate referees more closely into the campaign.
9. Encouragement should be given to the efforts of Donegal Celtic to bring back senior football to west Belfast.
10. Each Irish League club should designate a Football for All co-ordinator.
11. The IFA should engage Supporters Direct to discuss with clubs how to develop a 'community' orientation, to encourage wider access and participation and indeed assist their long-term viability.
12. Issues of ground-sharing between clubs should be explored and the conciliatory potential of the north-south Setanta Cup developed.
13. The association should discuss with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions the possibility of a Northern Ireland PFA being taken under the wing of one of its affiliates, so that players can take a more structured role in Football for All.
14. The new Football Development Centres offer an opportunity to take the Football for All campaign more deeply into the grassroots. Derry City FC should be formally approached as a possible base for an FDC in the city.
15. The grassroots development officers should be required to supply regular and rigorous statistics to the IFA on the numbers and type of participants in their programmes, to enhance data on the campaign's achievements.
16. The IFA should engage in early discussions with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure over indicators of the impact of Football for All, and more generally of participation in the sport, building on this baseline survey and the FDCs' data-gathering efforts.
17. The IFA should reissue the questionnaire compiled for this research over a (say) three-year cycle to track perceptions of campaign progress among those involved with the sport. To elevate response it should be accompanied by a letter from the chief executive indicating its importance, and be disseminated to all categories of respondent by e-mail; this will require the association ensuring all its contacts include an e-mail address, grouped by sector (eg coaches).
18. Government must do more to combat intolerance in sport, with ministers emulating the 'hands-on' approach of their Scottish counterparts. The Football Offences Act should be extended to Northern Ireland and government should liaise with the Scottish Executive on prospective Scottish legislative developments.
19. Government should also recognise the wider application of the good practice, particularly in the arena of 'co-production', developed by Football for All, recognising the limits of what government alone can do to implement the *A Shared Future* policy framework.
20. Football for All needs to be an integral part of the work of the IFA at all levels. In this light the ban on Sunday games, although recently revisited, can not be indefinitely sustained and should be removed at the earliest opportunity.
21. The campaign should operate as a discrete and, as resources allow, expanding unit of the association, reporting directly to the chief executive.
22. The broader advisory panel should be chaired by the IFA chair or chief executive, and the participation of external stake holders enhanced.
23. A proportion of the money from the soccer strategy should be allocated to Football for All, associated with continued efforts to lever in additional external support, such as via an application for core funding to the Community Relations Council.
24. A priority should be to employ an assistant to the community-relations officer, to pursue the work with clubs and the grass roots development officers.

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**Appendix A: questionnaire**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title (Mr/Ms, director, etc) \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What is your relationship to the sport (please circle)?**

 Supporter      Player      Coach      Referee      Manager  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What involvement have you had with Football for All (please tick)?**

- Took part in a campaign event / game
- Attended a workshop / training session which included campaign
- Discussed campaign informally with colleagues
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None (then skip next question)

**3. Which of these best describes your own experience of the campaign?**

- It was an eye-opener for me
- It was valuable in raising my awareness
- It was worth taking part in
- It was of little value
- It was of no value at all
- None of the above

**4. How much impact would you say the campaign has had on ... (circle)?**

- |  |          |             |              |  |
|--|----------|-------------|--------------|--|
| Sectarian behaviour at NI matches?         |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                                | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |
| Sectarian behaviour at Irish League games? |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                                | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |
| Racist behaviour at NI matches?            |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                                | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |
| Racist behaviour at Irish League games?    |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                                | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |

**5. How much impact has it had on attendance at NI matches by ...**

- |                               |          |             |              |  |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|--------------|--|
| Catholics?                    |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                   | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |
| Women/girls?                  |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                   | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |
| Members of ethnic minorities? |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                   | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |
| People with disabilities?     |          |             |              |  |
| None at all                   | Not much | Quite a lot | A great deal |  |

**6. How much impact has it had on attendance at Irish League games by ...**

Catholics?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
Women/girls?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
Members of ethnic minorities?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
People with disabilities?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal

**7. How much impact has it had on participation in the sport by ...**

Catholics?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
Women/girls?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
Members of ethnic minorities?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
People with disabilities?	None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal

**8. What effect has the campaign had on the image of football in NI?**

None at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal
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**9. What should its priorities be over the coming years?**

Generating broader media and public awareness of the campaign	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Using star players as role models to promote the campaign	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Ensuring the planned new stadium at the Maze is welcoming to all	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Lobbying for extension of the Football Offences Act to NI*	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Getting supporters to buy into the code of conduct	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Tying new money to improve club facilities to engagement with the campaign	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Developing a guidebook for clubs to take their responsibilities seriously	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important

\* This would punish sectarian or racist behaviour by fans.

Please use this space if you have any additional comments to make.

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Many thanks for completing this questionnaire.

Please return it to: **Robin Wilson, c/o Irish Football Association, 20 Windsor Avenue, Belfast BT9 6EE.**



**Recipients of Football for All campaign questionnaire**

Northern Ireland supporters' clubs	40
Irish League club managers	20
Irish League premiership players	250
Women's football clubs	45
Licensed coaches (including women's coaches)	900
Licensed referees	250
Grassroots development officers	25
Disabled regional squads, special schools / day centres	10
Chinese Football Association and NICRAS members	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>1580</b>

**Questionnaire 'scores' in detail**

For all bar question 3, scored from 1 to 5 (1 = no value, 5= an eye-opener), the questions that follow were scored from 1 to 4 (1 = none at all, 4 = a great deal). The higher the score in each case, the bigger the impact. The sequence (a) to (d), or (a) to (g) for question 9, reflects the order of the sub-questions on the questionnaire.

3. 3.6
4. (a) 3.2 (b) 2.4 (c) 3.0 (d) 2.3
5. (a) 2.4 (b) 2.7 (c) 2.3 (d) 2.5
6. (a) 2.1 (b) 2.3 (c) 2.0 (d) 2.2
7. (a) 2.4 (b) 2.9 (c) 2.5 (d) 2.7
8. 3.2
- 9 (a) 3.7 (b) 3.5 (c) 3.6 (d) 3.7 (e) 3.7 (f) 3.5 (g) 3.5

## Appendix B: interviews

### Interviewees

Steven Beacom (Belfast Telegraph)  
Aubrey Bingham / Kevin O'Neill (Disability Sport Northern Ireland)  
Sara Booth (Irish Football Association)  
Michael Boyd (Irish Football Association)  
Alan Crooks (Irish Football Association)  
John Delaney (Football Association of Ireland)  
Noel Doran (Irish News)  
Patrick Gasser (UEFA)  
John Gilmour (Scottish Executive)  
Gerard Lawlor (Cliftonville FC)  
Mark McClean (Dungoyne Boys)  
Garry McGladdery (Disability Action)  
David McVeigh (Irish League)  
Ciaran Mee (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure)  
Roy Millar (Irish Football Association)  
Maura Muldoon (Northern Ireland Women's FA)  
John News / Angharad Bunt (Sports Council)  
Jim Rainey (Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs)  
Jim Roddy (Derry City FC)  
Ed Smith / Stephen Watson (BBC Northern Ireland)  
Nigel Smyth (Confederation of British Industry)  
Alan Snoddy (ex-FIFA referee)  
Ian Stewart (Irish Football Association)  
Jim Weatherill (Special Olympics)  
Howard Wells (Irish Football Association)  
David White (anti-racism trainer)  
William Wong (Chinese FA)

### Interview guide

1. (Opener) Sense of IFA's Football for All Campaign, as observer or participant in some way.
2. Particular achievement(s) or examples of good practice.
3. Failings and lessons which can be learned.
4. Responsibilities of government: soccer strategy, Football Offences Act, 'bigotry task force'?
5. Responsibilities of clubs: stewarding, supporter behaviour, promotion of FfA.
6. Role of supporters themselves: code, identifying with campaign.
7. Role of players: contract clause?
8. Responsibilities of IFA: co-ordination, guidebook, training of coaches and refs, public awareness, Sunday games.
9. Other potential champions: ministers, star players, coaches?
10. Media coverage of sport: journalistic responsibilities?
11. New stadium—potential. National anthem?
12. Wider connections: GAA, FAI, SFA?
13. Future for campaign: from sectarianism to racism, widening involvement by Catholics and women/girls.
14. Structure of campaign: advisory panel, relationship to IFA activity generally, placing in 'mainstream' and getting to grassroots.
15. Funding of campaign: responsibility for funding post-Peace II.

### **Author cv**

Robin Wilson has been director of Democratic Dialogue since its foundation in 1995. He is chair of the policy committee of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council. He contributed to the recent A Shared Future document on community-relations policy. He is an adviser to the Council of Europe programme on intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention. He has been involved in several DD projects in the area of community relations, exploring the meaning of ‘parity of esteem’, international models of peace and reconciliation and ‘victims issues’. He chaired a DD working group on parades which liaised with the Quigley review, and he has written DD papers on policing and flags. He is a very keen (though equally very poor) five-a-side footballer.

### **Democratic Dialogue**

Democratic Dialogue is a think tank which develops policy answers to economic, social, cultural and political problems. Such problems rarely fit neatly into government’s departmental silos or academic disciplines. And policy innovation requires participation by practitioners and others within civil society. So out of round tables, focus groups, interviews and the like, DD generates publications with practical policy recommendations, subsequently taken up with the relevant governmental and non-governmental actors. It also offers informal advice to government and has been commissioned by non-governmental organisations to assist their own policy development.