



The Birr Way

The Underage Pathway



As Many Players As Possible.

Hold them for as long as possible.

Make them as good as possible.



What We Say We Are About.....



GAA Values

Community Identity

- Community is at the heart of our Association. Everything we do helps to enrich the communities we serve.
- We foster a clear sense of identity and place.

Amateur Status

- We are a volunteer led organisation.
- All our members play and engage in our games as amateurs.
- We provide a games programme at all levels to meet the needs of all our players.

Inclusiveness

- We welcome everybody to be part of our Association.
- We are anti-sectarian.
- We are anti-racist.

Respect

- We respect each other on and off the playing fields.
- We operate with integrity at all levels.
- We listen and respect the views of all.

Player Welfare

- We provide the best playing experience for all our players.
- We structure our games to allow players of all abilities reach their potential.

Teamwork

- Effective teamwork on and off the field is the cornerstone of our Association.
- Ní neart go cur le chéile (There is no strength without working together).

Our Behaviours Mirror Our Values

We All Belong

GAA Player Development
Framework



WHERE WE ALL BELONG

**WE ALL BELONG HERE
IN THIS PLACE. AT THIS TIME**

WE BELONG NOT BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE OR WHERE WE COME FROM

BEING HERE MEANS BELONGING

BELONGING MEANS KNOWING YOU'RE PART OF A COMMUNITY

A COMMUNITY THAT HAS A PLACE FOR ALL

WHERE POTENTIAL IS NURTURED

WHERE INDIVIDUALS BECOME TEAMS

WHO HONOUR THE LEGACY OF THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE

AND STRIVE TO BUILD A LEGACY OF THEIR OWN

SOME OF US PLAY

SOME OF US USED TO PLAY. SOME OF US NEVER PLAYED

WE ALL BELONG

BELONGING MEANS HAVING A VOICE

MEANS BEING ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOU THINK IS RIGHT

BEING LISTENED TO

BELONGING MEANS RESPECTING EACH OTHER

MEANS BEING THERE FOR EACH OTHER

ON THE PITCH. OFF THE PITCH

BELONGING MEANS ROLLING OUR SLEEVES UP AND DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

WE ALL BELONG WHETHER IT'S OUR FIRST DAY OR OUR HUNDREDDTH YEAR

WE ALL BELONG HERE BECAUSE THIS PLACE BELONGS TO US ALL

OUR GAA

WHERE WE ALL BELONG

Our identity

Birr – A Town of Hurling and Heritage

Birr is more than a town; it is a community bound together by history, culture, and above all, hurling.

Hurling is Birr's game. From generation to generation, the people of Birr have woven their spirit into the green and red jersey. That jersey is more than fabric — it personifies a town. It stands for excellence and respect.

In Birr, the team rises above the individual. To wear the green and red is to carry the hopes and dreams of the people. Each player becomes a guardian of the legend, entrusted with honouring those who came before and inspiring those yet to come.

That spirit has brought Birr glory on the greatest stage of all — **four All-Ireland titles**, shining proof of what a united town can achieve.

In Birr, hurling is not just played.

It is lived.

It is remembered.

It is passed on



About Us

The purpose of this player pathway is to offer support & guidance to our clubs & coaches on player development. The pathway is segregated into age grades, however this is just a guide, as players develop at different speeds.

The completion of this pathway is just the first stage of the process. Stage two involves you, the coach, utilising the information within & giving our players the best experience.





Foreword

This document aims to be a comprehensive blueprint which all our coaches use and work towards.

This document will be reviewed every 2 years

“Continuous Improvement Is Our Goal”

This document includes relevant information, tools and policies for our coaches. Cohesive collective coaching over the expanse of time is the logical way forward.

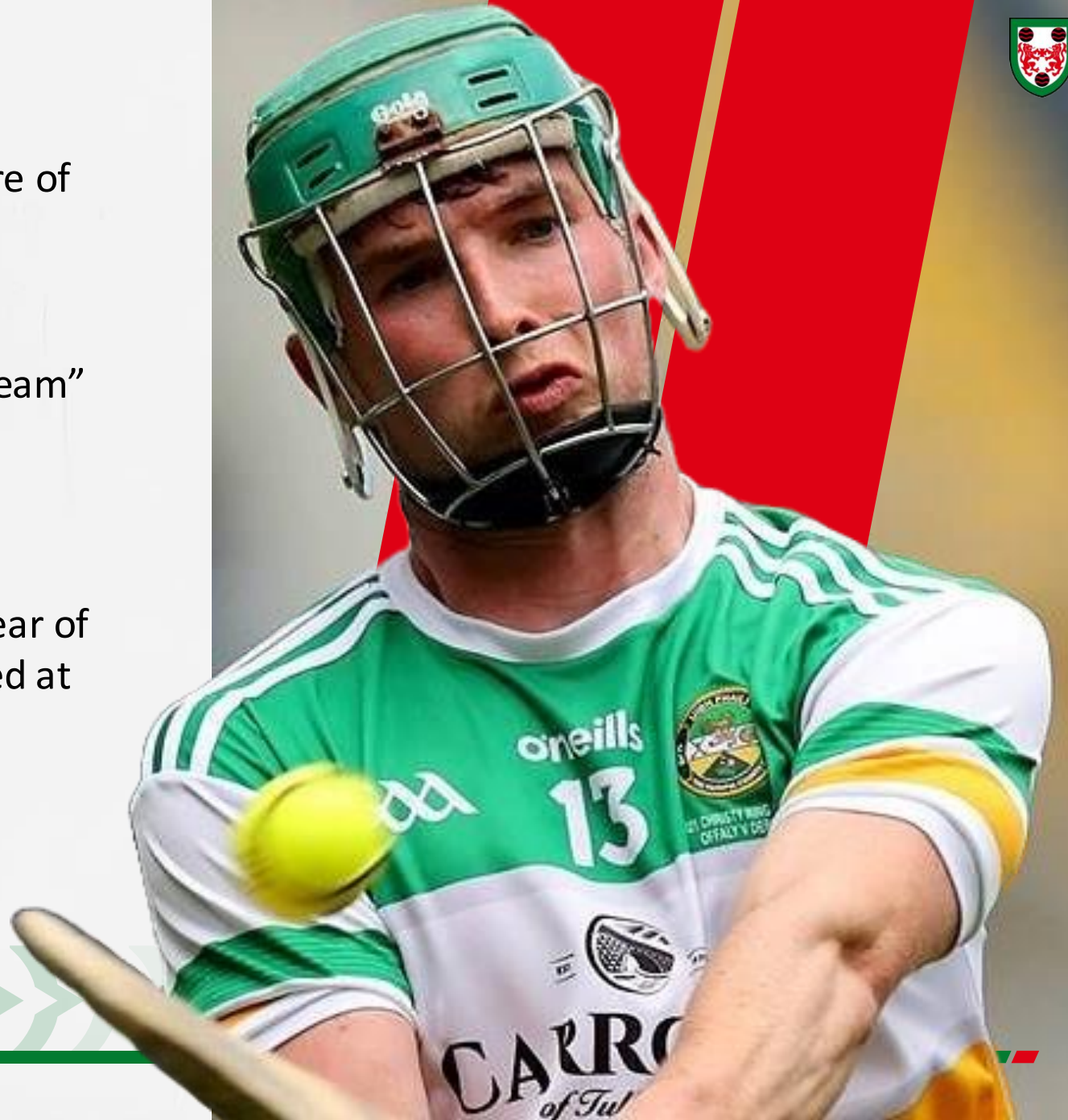
“We are all part of a ‘bigger picture’ Together we can achieve so much”



Player Pathways

Players develop at varying rates, we must be aware of that, therefore the “Pathway” as laid out here are “reference points” only, and we understand and expect that coaches will use their own valuable experiences as they shape their own particular “team” for the season/s ahead.

We are now encouraging our youth coaches to sit down at the start of each new season, under the guidance of the Clubs’ Coaching Officer and be clear of the Values underpinning the club, what is expected at each age group and to be given the necessary resources to help them thrive in their job



Our Philosophy

Our Mission

Our mission at underage level is for our club to provide the children of our community a safe and enjoyable environment to meet friends and learn the skills of Gaelic Games

Our Goal

To create a youth player pathway with the ultimate goal of bringing our players through to represent Birr GAA at senior level whilst creating an environment where every individual child can reach their full potential and inspire them to have a lifelong involvement with the club



Our Culture

Foster a culture and environment which is always enjoyable, developmentally appropriate and provides a holistic GAA experience where the individual persons long term development takes preference over player and teams short term success – ‘Playing time not side-line time’

The Birr Way – Core Pillars

The Key Focus Of The Birr Way Player Pathway, Which Will Be Reinforced With All Our Coaches & Players Across All Age Grades

& Feed Into Our Core Club Values At Underage Level



Participation & Inclusion



Participation for all throughout the underage grades during training & games. Remember every player is important to the team and club

Humility



Losing isn't Failure. Recognise that player/personal development comes before winning and that players develop at different rates and abilities

Player Retention



'As Many as possible for as long as possible and as good as possible' - Retaining our players right through from Nursery to Under 18 level & onto senior level is a core pillar of 'The Birr Way' Player Pathway programme



Establishing The Programme

Align with Senior Club Members
Ensure agreement on the desired outcomes of the programme



Draft Initial Programme
Develop the first draft with input from selected club members through one-on-one discussions



Coach Workshop
Ensure Organise a workshop with current coaches to gather targeted input and ideas



Parent and Youth Player Feedback
Seek input from parents, also capturing inferred feedback from our youth players



Club Member Feedback
Engage all club members to collect additional ideas and feedback



Formalise the Programme
Seek ratification of the programme via the Club Committee. The formalised plan will be documented in the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and included in the Club Development Plan



Publish and Track the Programme
Make the programme public and track its ongoing execution. Updates will be documented and reflected in the Club Development Plan and annually reviewed at AGM



Our planning process was designed to be straightforward. The initial draft of the programme was shaped by one-on-one conversations with key club members, ensuring alignment with existing strategic plans and local priorities.



The broader feedback approach gave everyone an opportunity to contribute. Ideas received have been integrated where appropriate.



Review of Document in 2 years



Teams



2025

Structure

Nursery u6	Birr Bears
u8	Go Games
u10	Go Games
u11	Go Games
u12	Shane Lowry League & Faithful Junior
u13	Shane Lowry League & Faithful Og
u14	League & Championship
u15	Feile
u16	League & Championship
u18	League & Championship

The Birr Way



The Birr player pathway programme starts at Under 6 nursery level and progresses up to Under 18 level. The below table provides a breakdown of the key stages in our underage structures

Stage	Child			Youth		
Age Group	Age 4-11			Age 12-18		
Phase	Nursery	Early Go Games	Late Go Games	Early Teenage	Mid Teenage	Late Teenage
Specific Age	4-6 Years	7-9 Years	10-11 Years	12-13 Years	14-15 Years	16-18 Years



The Birr Way



From a coaching and player development perspective and to support the key principles which underpin the 'Birr Way' philosophy - there are five key age groups / stages in the pathway which have detailed player characteristics and the practical elements that must be coached during these stages.



Stage	Approximate Age	Emphasis
Learning to master the ball	4 - 6 years	Should be about fun and participation with key emphasis on physical literacy and core movement skills with the ball
Learning to use the ball well	7 - 9 years	Major skills learning phase where all the basic skills are learned
Learning to play together	10 - 12 years	Emphasis on understanding how to play and work together as a team
Learning about positions	13 - 15 years	The principles of play and applying good game sense increases
Learning to perform	16 - 18 years	Combining all aspects of performance including – decision making, higher physical demands of the game and coping with competition

The Birr Way

The Underage Coach





Our Coaches

Our vision as a club is to create a coaching system which produces and supports the development of coaches and players. The GAA has developed a model of Coach Education to take account of the different playing capacities that exist between children (up to 11 years), youths (age 12 – 17) and adults (age 18+), and the competencies that a coach is required to display when working with each of these playing populations. These streams have been identified to cater for the diverse needs of children, of youths and of adults. All coaches involved with underage coaching for Birr GAA Club will be required to comply with the following requirements.

To safeguard our players, all our coaches are required to

Tobar Account

Vetted by An Garda Síochána

<https://www.gaa.ie/api/pdfs/image/upload/uc9zbv4tfutt2mikzh2a.pdf>

Abide by the GAA Code of Conduct

<https://www.gaa.ie/api/pdfs/image/upload/ohl9oq3mbgtnoi6arn22.pdf>

An introduction to coaching gaelic games ICCG Award



Complete the GAA Child Safeguarding 1 course



Key Principles of Our Coaching



Our aim is to create a coaching environment which supports the development of the player and more importantly the individual:

As well as using our own pool of coaches, it is also our goal annually to provide our children with additional coaching activities over the course of the year, with coaches from Offaly GAA and our own senior team and other teams within the club, to provide training sessions, skills sessions and workshops throughout the course of the year to help improve the children's development

Fun & Enjoyment

must be at the centre of our coaching sessions particularly at our younger age groups

Participation

for all, regardless of ability. Up to U-15 level it is encouraged that children should play and participate for as much time as possible in matches. At this level, however it also recognised competition is an important ingredient for player development both within the group and on the field of play

Games Based Approach

to training sessions with key focus on small sided games at our youngest age groups – it's proven that small sided games maximise number of touches of the ball each child gets at training e.g. 2v2, 3v3, 4v4 compared to large sided games e.g. 7v7 9v9 etc

Player & Person Development

We recognise that player/personal development comes before winning and that players develop at different rates and abilities

Player Retention

our aim is to keep as many children playing as possible throughout the underage system. Focus up to U-15 age group is on participation and not on winning

Development Of Core Skills

at all age groups using consistent coaching methods e.g. ability to strike off both sides and is a key coaching focus for 8-18 year olds to make them proficient by the time they reach senior level

The Important Role of Parents



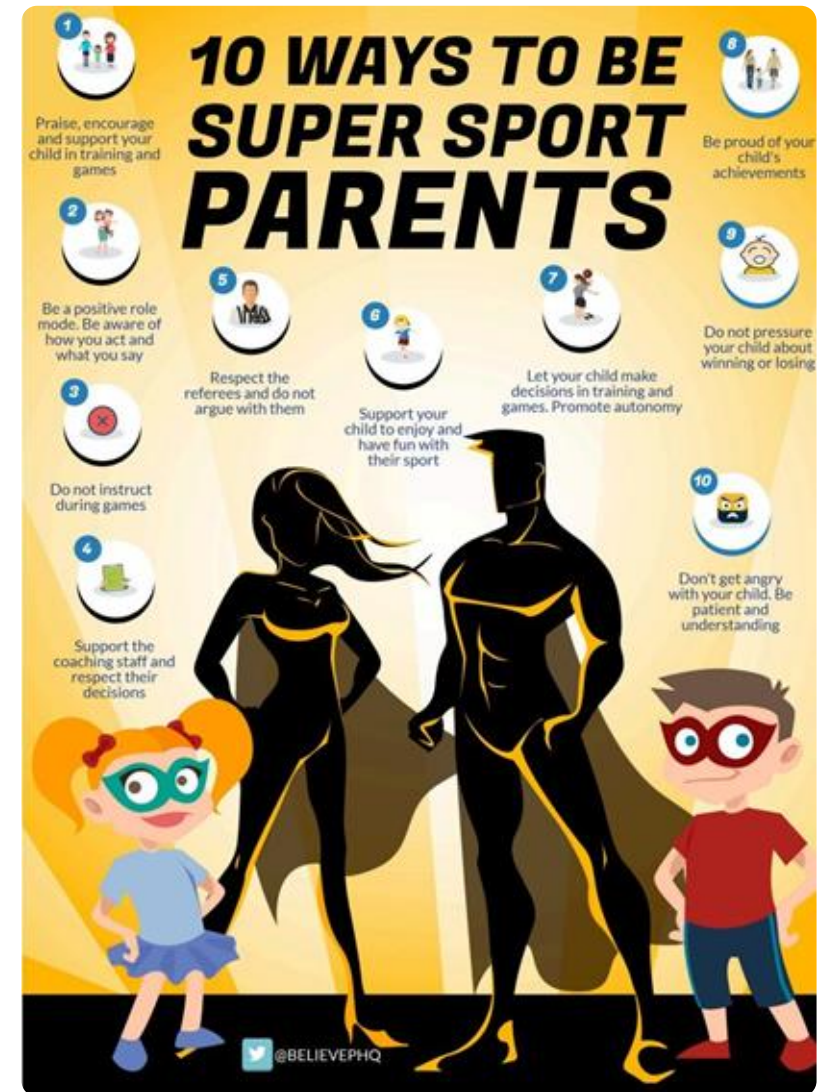
How Parents Can Help

- 01** GAA parents play a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting their child's participation, success and fun when engaging in Gaelic Games and Activities and without their input our club would cease to function effectively.

- 02** Parents are key stakeholders in Birr GAA, the contribution they can make to our games and activities is invaluable, particularly at underage level and in the day to day running of the club from washing team kits through to helping with coaching, transporting players, assisting with teams, fundraising and beyond. As part of the Birr Way, we embrace parental involvement in the club in a positive way and that channels of communication between the club, its volunteers and parents are working as effectively as possible from the very start.

- 03** Children and young people take greater enjoyment from participating in Gaelic Games if their parents are positively involved. They are also more likely to continue playing for longer and have more opportunities to reach their sporting potential. It is important that parents reflect on their own behaviour when their child is participating, ensuring that their support is having a positive impact on their child's progression, development and enjoyment. Discipline is something that the club would like to try and continuously improve. It involves everybody, players, coaches and parents. It is vitally important that Children get the support of their parents when the players are young, to avoid issues in later years.

- 04** As a club we will communicate this message to the parents towards the start of every season to remind them of their responsibilities. We will resend it periodically during the season. Birr welcome the support of everybody and hope you enjoy the activities. With that in mind, we ask you to take a few minutes to read the poster and do your best to follow it.



A Child Centered Environment

Coaches / Parents



WE LOVE

- ✓ HAVING FUN
- ✓ WHEN YOU ENCOURAGE US
- ✓ PLAYING & KEEPING ACTIVE
- ✓ GETTING TO SCORE
- ✓ BEING LISTENED TO / VALUED
- ✓ TRYING LOTS OF GAMES
- ✓ MAKING FRIENDS
- ✓ CREATING OUR OWN GAMES
- ✓ YOU TAKING AN INTEREST IN OUR LIVES OUTSIDE OF GAA
- ✓ FEELING PROUD OF OURSELVES
- ✓ KNOWING THAT YOU CARE ABOUT US

PLEASE DON'T

- ✗ SHOUT AT US
- ✗ PUT US UNDER PRESSURE
- ✗ LOSE YOUR PATIENCE
- ✗ HAVE US WAIT IN BIG QUEUES
- ✗ TALK FOREVER
- ✗ STOP US FROM QUESTIONING
- ✗ MAKE US SIT FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME
- ✗ MAKE US FEEL LEFT OUT
- ✗ LIMIT OUR CHANCES OF PLAYING / LEARNING
- ✗ FORGET THAT WE ARE ONLY YOUNG KIDS



Within Every Underage Team...

...There's Potential For A First Class Background Team

Which Parents / Family / Club Members Come To Mind When Considering The Following Roles?



County / Professional Sports Background Team



- ↳ Physio, Team Doctor
- ↳ Nutritionist
- ↳ Sports Psychologist
- ↳ Strength & Conditioning Coach
- ↳ Statistics & Analysis
- ↳ Attacking Coach, Defensive Coach
- ↳ Head of Logistics
- ↳ Training Camp Organiser, Team Culture Coach

Underage Squad Mentors / Helpers



- ↳ Comforter when young players have bumps/falls, First Aider
- ↳ Bring fruit & water to sessions, Prepare recovery drinks/protein etc. for players
- ↳ Support through challenges, Encourage ALL players, Be a great listener & questioner
- ↳ At youngest ages: chase/be chased, Assist with stretches/warm-up then body weight exercises
- ↳ Keep scores in mini-games or at stations/individual challenges, A sharp eye on team/player traits
- ↳ Act as a give & go for scorer & retrieve balls, Be tackled/apply token pressure
- ↳ Helping with transport to & from practices/games
- ↳ Summer/Cúl Camp organisers, Organisers of team/club social events e.g. Halloween/xmas parties



The Times They Are A Changin'



We have an influx of immigrants into the town in recent years and it is a necessity for the club to actively engage these in our GAA club and make them feel part of our club



Multi Sport



All the studies show that playing multiple sports particularly up to u13 is hugely beneficial to players development



We need to work with other sports to try and avoid training's overlapping where possible.



We should encourage our players up to age u13 to play multiple sports particularly in the GAA offseason





Gaelic Football In The Club

U8 and u10 it is mandatory for the coaches of these teams to do 1 football session for every 3 hurling. The u8's and u10's are entered in the GoGames tournament and are expected to fulfill these fixture bar exceptional circumstances.

At u8 and u10 the club will not facilitate other clubs playing with us as the teams are very small and we would like to ensure and encourage all our own players to get plenty of playing time. We also feel because of the low numbers (9 a side) all other clubs should be well capable of fielding teams

At u12 if we have the interest from a coach (coaches) to continue the football journey we will more than facilitate this journey and are open to including other club players as numbers (13 a side) are much bigger and they may be needed to help the team continue the footballing journey



Playing Out Of Age Group Policy



The Birr Player pathway guidance on 'playing up' is that players 'playing up' should not deprive players who are 'at age' of game time.

- + 'Playing up' is where a player plays and/or trains with an older panel of players; for example: an under 12 player plays with an under 14 team and includes all juvenile age categories across the club. It is commonplace and necessary at times but it is important that the Club does not unintentionally demotivate 'at age' players to the point where they will eventually give up playing and they must get playing time in matches. The Club policy on this issue is to foster and develop both weak and strong players.
- + In team selection, preference should always be given to players who are 'at age' i.e. those who will be overage the following year. This should be club policy for all teams up to U-14 level. Coaches may deviate from this policy if there is good reason not to select a player e.g. indiscipline, poor attendance record. In such cases the player should be informed why he is not playing.
- + The Club Executive will monitor these new guidelines and ensure that fairness and equity is applied. When a player plays up, the coach of his/her own team should be consulted by the mentor of the team in which he/she is playing up for. The parents must also be consulted with regarding their child playing up. The health and well-being of all our underage players is paramount in all decisions regarding the impact of players 'playing up'. The Club will however facilitate 'playing up' where players are required to make up a team due to shortage in numbers.
- + If issues arise with the implementation of these guidelines, parents should first discuss the matter with a team mentor. Following this, parents may contact the Child Welfare Officer by email or text in regard to their child not getting adequate game time.
- + The Club wishes that common sense, fairness and good communication between mentors, players and parents will resolve most issues/disputes.



League v Championship u14 – u18

From U14 – U18 The League Should Still Be Seen As Player Developmental And All Players Should Be Afforded Substantial Match Minutes.

Championship is ‘team developmental’ and the team deemed most likely to be competitive by the Coaching Team should be selected. Selection should not be solely based on ability, but also strongly reflect attendance at training and the player’s commitment, attitude, and effort at training.

Playing time cannot be guaranteed in Championship matches and this should be communicated to players and parents in advance of the Championship. Coaches should still endeavor where at all possible to use as many players as the Championship rules allow. It is a privilege to represent the Club.



Coaches Changing Teams – Something To Consider



Nursery to u18 is a long time for coaches to stay with the one group



At u14 to u18 coaches considering changing for a year or even for a block of session in season



The belief is that different coaches coach in different ways and have different methods and that by kids experiencing different ways of doing things it will help the players overall development

Logistically it is envisioned where possible that the teams would train at the same time at the same venue.





How We Will Know Its Working

Continuous Pipeline Of Transition To The Senior Club

We will track the numbers of 5 year olds at nursery level and track the numbers exiting to the senior club every year

2025

2026

Nursery (boys 5 year olds)	Entering Senior Club	Nursery (boys 5 year olds)	Entering Senior Club
13	0 (as age grade changed from u17 to u18)	13	



As well as

Personal Growth and Lifelong Engagement

Supported athletes' personal, social, and educational development, not just their sporting performance.

Promoted values such as teamwork, discipline, resilience, and leadership.