

THE HEART OF THE GAME

Improving Football Governance through Supporter Involvement
and Community Ownership



F  **RAS**

Friends of the Rebel Army Society

Supporters' Handbook



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IMPROVING FOOTBALL GOVERNANCE THROUGH SUPPORTER INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP



SVENSKA FOTBOLLSSUPPORTERUNIONEN



Federación de Accionistas y Socios del Fútbol Español

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PROJECT PARTNERS :

A la nantaise (France)

Associação de Adeptos Sportinguistas (Sporting Portugal: Portugal)

Cooperatives Europe

Federación de Accionistas y socios del Fútbol Español (National Federation for Supporters' Trusts: Spain)

Svenska Footballssupporterunionen (Swedish Football Supporters' Union: Sweden)

Unione Italiana Sport per tutti – Comitato Regionale Emilia Romagna (Sport for All: Italy)

Unsere Kurve (National organisation seeking to protect supporter-ownership: Germany)

Vzw Eskabee 1935 FC (A football club formed by the fans of the former KSK Beveren: Belgium)

FORAS (Friends of the Rebel Army Society, owners of Cork City FC: Ireland)

Supporters Direct Europe



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. HIGGINS

I would like to send my best wishes to all those involved in the Conference in Cork on 10 and 11 November 2012 - 'The Heart of the Game - Why Supports are vital to Football' As a strong supporter of the League of Ireland over the years, I am very encouraged to see football supporters coming together like this for the first time to develop ways of addressing the long-term challenges facing football in Ireland.

I want to congratulate the hosts FORAS (the supporters' trust which owns and runs Cork City) for leading this important initiative as part of the 'Improving Football Governance through Supporter Involvement and Community Ownership' project, in partnership with Supporters Direct, and supported by funding from the European Commission.

I would like to wish all the participants well - supporters' groups, club representatives, the FAI, the League of Ireland, and representatives from overseas leagues. I trust that your discussions at the Conference will be fruitful and will help to achieve the common goal of strengthening the long-term sustainability of our domestic game.

Michael D Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland

THE HEART OF THE GAME HANDBOOK

There is a very common saying in sport - football, the critics insist, is a poor man's game. Rugby has its wealthy benefactors in Ireland, while the GAA has the backing of rural society and beyond. In contrast, the finest days of our country's domestic football league happened quite some time ago.

Some food for thought: 174,000 Irish people traveled to watch football in the UK in 2011, spending €100 million in the process according to a VisitBritain survey¹. The winner of the League of Ireland that same year claimed a prize fund of just 0.1% of that total (€100,000).

No white knights, investment funds or American sporting tycoons are clamouring to make fortunes from League and Cup titles or the handful of European games our clubs experience each summer. Instead, it has been supporters - the **Heart of the Game** in Ireland - that have pulled together to ensure the survival of some of the League's greatest names.

This handbook touches on four key considerations within Irish football - Legal, Governance, Culture and Community - and has brought together examples of some of the best practices going on within the League of Ireland today, accompanied by additional expert and practical advice. This is by no means a comprehensive toolkit but it does give a very broad overview of some of the issues that League of Ireland supporters are in a position to take action on today.

No football club in Ireland could exist without the voluntary time and money given up by its fans week in, week out. A growing number of clubs are run by their supporters on a daily basis, and in developing a strong voice for ourselves we are taking up a leading position - ahead of many of the European leagues we are inspired by - in the battle for greater supporter involvement in football.

In the words of a founding member of FORAS, Patrick Shine: 'If you need a Supporters' Trust, it's already too late' - so start to get organised today.

Niamh O'Mahony

Project Manager

Improving Football Governance through Supporter Involvement and Community Ownership

Funded by the European Commission, in partnership with Supporters Direct Europe

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1.1 - IMPROVING FOOTBALL GOVERNANCE : PROJECT BACKGROUND

“FORAS became a sought after source of advice for other clubs”

It was during the respected ownership tenure of Cork businessman Brian Lennox that the seeds for the Friends of the Rebel Army Society (FORAS) Supporters' Trust were first sown. Members of the Cork City Supporters Club sought to create an entity that could proactively support the club in its daily operations by developing an infrastructural asset which, in turn, could be leased to the club for a nominal fee.

However, on the eve of the Trust's launch in August 2008, Cork City Football Club - now owned by investment fund Arkaga- went into examinership. FORAS immediately became the established voice of the fans and in setting up hardship funds to assist players and staff through the difficulties, the Trust quickly gained credibility and widespread support.

The club exited the examinership process in October and while FORAS initially engaged with the new owner, Tom Coughlan, concerns over the long-term future of the club saw FORAS apply for a licence to participate in the League of Ireland for 2010 – though only as a safety net to ensure there would be a team from Cork in the domestic league. When the holding company of Cork City FC - Cork City Investment FC Limited - was wound up by the High Court in February 2010, Cork City FORAS

Co-op (Cork City FC) was born.

A manager, a squad of out-of-contract professionals, training facilities and club sponsors were secured in the days and hours ahead of the new season, and it was a miraculous 1-1 draw against Derry City at the Brandywell that heralded the supporters-owned entity's arrival to the League of Ireland on March 5th, 2010.

The Trust had taken on the running of a football club far sooner than was ever anticipated, but with the help of advice and guidance from Shamrock Rovers, the FAI and Supporters Direct in the UK, FORAS has gone from strength to strength.

The club regained the Cork City Football Club name in the summer of 2010 before returning to the Premier Division in 2012 as First Division champions. The Trust's relationship with Supporters Direct continued to develop during this time, all while

FORAS became a sought-after source of advice for other clubs and supporters groups around Ireland.

It was on the back of this growing and very apparent need for support, guidance and practical assistance in Ireland that FORAS was invited to become part of the 'Improving Football Governance through Supporter Involvement and Community Ownership project' in the summer of 2011, in partnership with Supporters Direct Europe.

The need for a more formal and organised approach to this support is also seen in the ongoing casework in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk and Galway today, and in the broad interest shown in the project's Heart of the Game conference, which was hosted in Cork in November 2012.



Image : Pat Healy

1.2 - CANVASSING OPINION : GIVING FANS A VOICE

"..including the assertion that clubs need to take responsibility for themselves"



Image : Billy Galligan

The Improving Football Governance project could not understand the needs of League of Ireland supporters today without engaging in a period of opinion gathering and canvassing during the project's lifetime.

An online fans survey was conducted across Europe, including Ireland, between September 1st, 2012 and October 15th, 2012 where supporters were invited to answer a series of questions online or were presented with paper copies of the survey at games in Cork, Dublin and Dundalk.

The same set of questions was asked across all partner countries – in order to feed into Europe-wide results for the final project report - though each national group also submitted three country-specific queries. There were 1,509 responses in total in Ireland, the highest return percentage of all partners when compared to country population.

The belief in the value of Fan Ownership was clearly expressed, however. Over 63% of respondents were supporters of clubs with strong supporter representation and involvement (Cork City, Shamrock Rovers, Bohemians and Sligo Rovers). 73% of these fans said they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with how their clubs are run.

Over 60% of respondents believed that supporter ownership or involvement would improve the running of their club, while 70% of fans said they would join a supporters organisation that had the aim of gaining an ownership stake at their club because of their belief that 'the club board (would) listen to fans more'.

Just under a third of respondents (27.4%) took the time to detail what they consider to be good practice within the League - highlighted below.

While Match Night displays, stadium atmospheres and away travel initiatives were widely highlighted, the ownership models of FORAS at Cork City and the Members Club at Shamrock Rovers were both singled out for extensive praise. Governance issues also featured prominently in fans' thoughts, as did the general ethos of Fan Ownership of the football club.

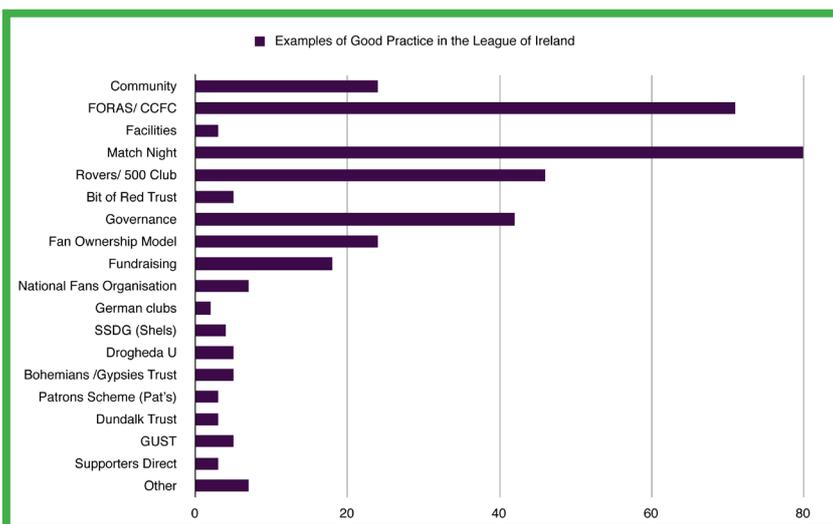
A number of critical remarks were also made, including the assertion that clubs need to take responsibility for themselves and the belief that Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs) are not yet being utilised fully and appropriately by clubs. There was some additional feedback on ticket prices and facilities, the marketing of the League and the need for Irish domestic football to improve in terms of player development. For additional survey results, see Handbook Annex from Page 62.

For the full survey results, email

> info@heartofthegame.ie

SUPPORTERS SURVEY KEY FINDINGS

- 89% of fans are unsatisfied with how football is run in Ireland
- 82% of fans feel their views are completely ignored at national level
- 64% of fans feel they have little or no involvement in decision making at their club
- 97% of fans would like to have a meaningful input into issues affecting the Airtricity League





1.3 - LEARNING FROM HISTORIES PAST

“The Supporters’ Trust as it currently exists is a new idea”

Contributed By:

David Toms, School of History, UCC

As a discipline of study, history sometimes suffers from an inability to show its value to the wider world, the real world. It may seem that the aims of this handbook, to give supporters the means to deepen their involvement with the football club they support in the League of Ireland, are a novel idea. For people to have a say in how a thing they love, a thing to which they give more time than some think sensible, may not seem like the concern of history or the historian. However, by knowing about the times past, we can better understand its present, and so we can plan for its future.

In the history of the League of Ireland, the Supporters’ Trust as it currently exists is a new idea. I can point to no historical precedent in the League to say that we are reviving something old; nonetheless, the League’s history points out a key

ingredient we have had in the past, continue to have in the present, and will form the basis of any future it is to have where Trusts are concerned: community.

When the League of Ireland (founded in 1921 and then called the Free State League) was expanding the number of teams playing in it towards the end of the 1920s, one city where a team applied for election was Waterford. They had been unsuccessful in a bid for membership on a number of occasions, but were finally accepted in 1930 – and it was junior side Waterford Celtic FC that would become Waterford FC.

However, such a thing did not happen overnight nor did it happen without the whole of Waterford city’s community of football lovers getting involved. A supporters’ club was established, which was sufficiently strong to buy Forester’s Hall in the city for the use of members of the supporters’ club or anyone involved at any level with football in Waterford.

Share capital was raised through vigorous appeals to local businesses with a special variety performance night held in one of Waterford’s cinemas as part of efforts to raise money and awareness of the new club.

Business people were encouraged to support the team as the economic benefits of visiting fans coming and spending their money in Waterford was extolled in the local press.

This was a cross-community effort to ensure that the club got the best start it possibly could, although it must be said that the club encountered serious financial difficulties throughout the 1930s, coming in and out of the League. The point still stands, however, that a community was capable of coming together around its football club to show their support.²

In Cork, in the same era, their first Free State League side, Fordson FC, had a ready-made community in the shape of the workers from the city’s Ford plant on the Marina. As one of the city’s largest employers, to have a football team that did well (they won the FAI Cup memorably in 1926 against Shamrock Rovers), alongside a factory that was doing well at the same time, helped bring the community together. The team, especially given its huge success, was encouraged by the plant’s management but the impetus for setting up the club actually lay with Harry Buckle, a footballer working in the plant.³

IN THE HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF IRELAND, THE SUPPORTERS’ TRUST AS IT CURRENTLY EXISTS IS A NEW IDEA.

I CAN POINT TO NO HISTORICAL PRECEDENT IN THE LEAGUE TO SAY THAT WE ARE REVIVING SOMETHING

Examples of such teams are littered throughout the history of the League, from Fordson's to Jacobs, St. James' Gate and Transport⁴. But such a definite sense of community doesn't just come from clubs like these, tied to a specific group of people – a community like this can be created through and by any club. Being a member of an organisation like a Supporters' Trust – like membership of the Waterford FC Supporter's Club in 1930 – can help to strengthen an already existing community, while breathing new life into communities in need of something positive.

In the past decade, as Ireland shifted from a credit-driven boom to crippling recession, a similar trend was experienced in domestic football. The woes of teams like Dublin City FC, Kilkenny City FC, Bohemians, Shelbourne, Monaghan United, Sporting Fingal, Cork City and Galway United - to mention just a few - indicated a poverty of sustainable club ownership that all too readily reflected in the collapse of the wider economy. The Supporters' Trust movement - rooted communities that have sometimes lost not just their football club, but are feeling the effects of the recession - is a positive reaction to these crises.

This handbook, a reaction to recent history, is more than a guide that details the ins and outs of how to establish and run a Supporters' Trust for your club – it is a chance to ensure that the footballing community to which you belong isn't lost to history's sometimes enormously condescending posterity; to let you know that by even reading this, you are part of, and present at, the making of your own history. And so to the future, where the past isn't very far away at all...

2. All of this information has been gleaned from Munster Express, Munster Express, October 4 1929; August 8 1930; November 8 1929; July 18 1930; August 8 1930; April 4 1930

3. For more on the Ford plant in general see Miriam Nyhan, *Are You Still Below? Ford's Cork Marina Plant 1917-1984*, Cork: The Collins Press, 2007.

4. For more on teams based around the factory see D. Toms "The Brightest Couple of Hours": The factory, Interfirm and Interhouse Leagues in Ireland, 1922-1973' in D. Convery (ed.) *Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working Class Life*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press 2013



Image: Pat Healy



1.4 - IRISH FOOTBALL TODAY : THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

“On the field, relative success has been enjoyed by both domestic and national teams”

In September 2005, a White Paper on the Strategic Direction of the Eircom League was published ⁵. The main function of the report was to create a ‘vision of success for the league by 2010’. Included were a number of key recommendations that would radically overhaul the structure and the development of the League of Ireland.

Eight years on, and many of these problems still need to be addressed. Despite the League’s merger with the FAI in 2006, the issues of facilities, the structure of the league, marketing and club administration still exist.

On the field, relative success has been enjoyed by both domestic and national teams. History was made when Shamrock Rovers became the first Irish side to reach the group stages of a European competition in 2011. Advances in the standard of domestic football are highlighted by the growing number of young players moving from League of Ireland sides to English and Scottish football clubs as well as the Republic of Ireland’s qualification for Euro 2012, for which six homegrown players were initially picked to travel to Poland. The recent establishment of the Bus Eireann National Women’s League is also another hugely positive step in terms of developing domestic women’s football.

It is clear that there is further potential for Irish football; however, in order for this to be realised, we need a renewed collective and unified approach. According to the 2005 report, “The Eircom League is currently trapped in a downward spiral. A poor product with unattractive facilities leads to a lack of support, minimal sponsorship and low levels of income.” ⁶

It is with the help of supporters and followers of Irish football that this ‘downward spiral’ can be reversed, and transformed into a sustainable league of which we can all be proud of.

In terms of the structure of the FAI, it can be best split into three sections: the FAI Council, the Board of Management and Committees as well as the FAI administration staff. The FAI Council is made up of 60 members from across Irish football and is made up by a broad range of members of the Association, ranging from associates from the four provincial organisations, representatives from the Defense Forces, the Schoolboys FAI and the Women’s Football Association of Ireland.

The Council is responsible for monitoring the activities of the FAI and for monitoring the Board’s governance of the Association.

The Council is also responsible for writing Codes of Practice for its members, electing the FAI’s President and also has the authority to approve - or otherwise - the election of all Honorary Officers and other elected Board members not directly elected by Council ⁷.

The FAI Board has a maximum of ten members. The Board reports on its work to the Council at each meeting of that body and also consults with the Council in developing and progressing major policies of the Association. The Board also has the authority to define and approve specific regulations around the various criteria to be fulfilled by clubs in order to be admitted to the FAI’s domestic competitions and UEFA’s club competitions.

The administration staff are responsible for the day-to-day running of the FAI. The staff are located at the FAI’s headquarters in Abbotstown, Dublin. According to Seán McCárthaigh of the Irish Examiner, the FAI had 173 employees at the end of 2011, including 17 senior managers ⁸.

The Airtricity League is the top tier of Irish football and dates back to 1921. Originally established as just one division, the League of Ireland added a second tier in 1985 and has more recently developed the Airtricity U19 League.

IT IS WITH THE HELP OF SUPPORTERS AND FOLLOWERS OF IRISH FOOTBALL THAT THIS ‘DOWNWARD SPIRAL’ CAN BE REVERSED, AND TRANSFORMED INTO A SUSTAINABLE LEAGUE OF WHICH WE CAN ALL BE PROUD OF.

Following the recommendations made in the 2005 Genesis Report, the League of Ireland came under the control of the FAI in 2006. The League is run on an operational level by the FAI's Competitions Department, which is overseen by Airtricity League Director Fran Gavin.

The National League Executive Committee (NLEC) is the governing body of the Airtricity League. The NLEC has six members. The NLEC is responsible for the effective management and control of the FAI National League competitions, in accordance with the terms of the Participation Agreement signed between the FAI and each Participant Club and subject to the direction and approval of the FAI Board⁹.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Additional resources including the Participation Agreement and FAI Rule Book are available on www.fai.ie

INCLUDED IN THE NLEC TERMS OF REFERENCE:

- To organise annual League Competitions for participant clubs and annual cup competitions, inter-league competitions, football matches and other national competitions as may be deemed appropriate by the FAI
- To ensure the Participation Agreement and its infrastructure is working to the overall aims of the FAI
- To assist participant clubs to provide appropriate facilities
In order to participate in the League on an annual basis, clubs must be issued with a Licence in accordance with the FAI Club Licensing System and continue to adhere to the terms of that Licence



Image : Tony Tobin

5. Genesis Report (2005): <http://foot.ie/inc/pdf/genesis.pdf>

6. Genesis Report (2005): <http://foot.ie/inc/pdf/genesis.pdf> . Page 3.

7. <http://www.fai.ie/fai/about-fai/fai-board-and-council.html>

8. McCaigh, S. (2012) FAI staff stikeover 10% pay cut plans, Irish Examiner (online). Available at: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/fai-staff-threaten-strikeover-10-pay-cut-plans-203041.html>

9. <http://www.airtricityleague.ie/about/airtricity-league-info>
http://www.fai.ie/agents_info/2011ParticipationAgreement.pdf

10. http://www.fai.ie/agents_info/FAIRuleBook2011.pdf



Image : Macdara Ferris

1.5 - BENEFITS OF SUPPORTER INVOLVEMENT

"In practical terms, supporter ownership is democracy in motion"

Supporters, arguably, are the most important stakeholders in football. In this regard, it seems logical that they should have a say in who runs their football club; however, for the majority, this is not the case. Whether it be Russian oligarchs or local business men, football clubs are essentially - and in the main - being run without meaningful input from their fans, who are "the financial and cultural mainstay of football" according to Supporters Direct Europe's 2012 position paper.¹¹

There are exceptions with Barcelona often cited as the ideal example of a fan-owned club, while German supporters (or members as they are known) are legally required to own a '50 plus one' stake in their club. The norm, however, is for football clubs to be a commercial entity.

This growing clamour for supporters to have a greater voice has been supported at both the national and political level. In May 2006, the European Independent Review (EIR) published a report it had commissioned from Portugal's deputy Prime Minister, Jose Luis Arnaut. Arnaut's report presented a series of recommendations aimed at curbing and controlling the commercial 'excesses' that have been viewed as bringing professional football in Europe into disrepute.

Arnaut argued that supporters should have a greater say in the running of the clubs they support, saying: "Properly structured supporter involvement will help to contribute to improved football governance of clubs."¹² This viewpoint summarises the many prominent and beneficial roles that supporters play in the game, many of which are also highlighted in Supporters Direct Europe's 2012 position paper.¹³

The paper adds: "Benefits of supporter involvement include but are not limited to: the promotion of core European values such as democracy, citizenship, transparency, financial sustainability, community development, combating corruption, education and training."¹⁴

In practical terms, supporter ownership is democracy in motion. Supporters' Trusts are committed to a common goal of the mutual ownership of shares by its members, enabling supporters to voice their opinion. A striking component of the Trust movement is the ability of fans to put aside their differences and work together for the good of the club. It is this mutual co-operation that makes supporter ownership an attractive proposition.

The formation of Supporters' Trusts can also be seen as a key shift in the organisation and governance of football.

There has been a recent surge in the supporters' movement in Ireland and the UK. With over 150 registered Trusts in the UK alone, it is clear that supporter involvement is becoming increasingly important. The benefits of supporter and community ownership can also be seen across Europe.

The Bundesliga Report 2013¹⁵ identifies the current economic state of German football and some of the key findings include those highlighted below.

The Bundesliga has achieved this success all while their members maintain a stake of at least 51% in the club. A similar regulation is also in place in Sweden, where members of sporting organisations must control at least 50% +1 of voting shares of all clubs.

The rule is under review, however, and in response many of Sweden's most prominent football clubs have now included the '50+1' ethos within their own constitutions.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE BUNDESLIGA REPORT 2013

- On average 44,293 spectators flocked to each match during the 2011-12 season; an increase of 5.2% against the previous season, which saw the 42,000 mark broken for the first time in the Bundesliga's history.
- Despite the price of tickets being on average half of that of England, the Bundesliga has managed to increase its match-day takings by 21.3% since 2008-09, representing a greater increase than for revenues in the categories of advertising (13.2%) and media (11.8%).
- As an employer, German professional football is equivalent in size to an international corporation. The 36 clubs employ a total of 44,284 people either directly or on a contracted basis.

This ethos has been influenced directly by that of Supporters Direct Europe, who firmly argue that the inclusion of supporters in club governance will inevitably lead to a stronger future for that same club.

On a more local level, the results of supporter ownership can also be seen here in Ireland, both on and off the field.

Supporter-owned clubs such as Shamrock Rovers, Cork City and Sligo Rovers have enjoyed healthy attendances and an increase in sponsorship, combined with playing success.

Community ownership creates a sense of unity, not only within the club but throughout the wider locality.

It also helps in establishing a sense of identity and understanding, an understanding that the club is not just owned by the people, but run for the people.

Business benefits of supporter involvement include long term and more sustainable partnerships ¹⁶. This is none more evident than in Cork where University College Cork (UCC) and Cork City FC announced a four-year strategic agreement between the two entities in 2012. ¹⁷

The positive effects of community ownership can also be seen beyond the sporting realm, especially in Cork where a new independent film festival, IndieCork, has been established using Cork City FC as its model. More information on this is available from:

> www.indiecork.com

Further research from Supporters Direct also shows that supporter-owned clubs enjoy greater fan involvement - in terms of representatives and volunteers – than other forms of ownership. ¹⁸



Image: Billy Galligan

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11. Supporters Direct Europe (2012). Supporters Direct Europe Position Paper – The Heart of the Game: why supporters are vital to improving governance in football. London: Supporters Direct. P 12
 12. Peter Kennedy (2012) Supporters Direct and supporters' governance of football: A model for Europe? Football-Supporters and the Commercialisation of Football: Comparative Responses Across Europe, Vol.13 Issue 3.
 13. The Supporters Direct Position Paper is available online here: <http://www.supporters-direct.org/homepage/what-we-do/europe-2/sd-europe-paper>
 14. Supporters Direct Europe (2012). Supporters Direct Europe Position Paper – The Heart of the Game: why supporters are vital to improving governance in football. London: Supporters Direct. P8
 15. http://static.bundesliga.com/media/native/autosync/report_2013_gb_72dpi.pdf
 16. Supporters Direct (2011). Briefing Paper 4: Business Advantages of Supporter Community Ownership. London: Supporters Direct P 50
 17. UCC website (2012). Cork: UCC. <http://www.ucc.ie/en/news/summary-186012-en.html>
 18. Supporters Direct (2011). Briefing Paper 4: Business Advantages of Supporter Community Ownership. London: Supporters Direct.



2.1 - FAN OWNERSHIP : THE IRISH CONTEXT

“..various legal problems are often the consequence of financial problems”

Contributed By:
Seán Ó Conaill & Shane O'Connor

This section of the handbook is designed to give some background to the legal context in which football in Ireland operates. Irish football clubs have been no strangers to the Courts and legal problems. These various legal problems are often the consequence of financial problems and, as a result, if supporters are to take a more active role in the running of their football clubs, they need to be particularly aware of the legal context.

The nature of this project focuses on support ownership in particular and the various methods that are available to order to achieve this. The element of this process is vital and requires a certain level of foresight and planning.

It is important to note that some legal terminology varies from the normal everyday understanding of particular terms and words. Very often, for example, words such co-operative, members, trust and company are used in normal everyday discourse to represent particular concepts or idea. However, in the legal context, the law usually gives a precise legal definition to these terms some of which can differ from the normal everyday understanding.

DISCLAIMER:

This handbook contains general information in relation to co-operatives based on Irish law. Please note, however, that it does not constitute legal or commercial advice, nor is it intended to create a solicitor-client relationship with either the authors or with FORAS. Neither is it intended to provide a comprehensive or detailed statement of the law. No liability whatsoever is accepted by the authors or by FORAS for any action taken in reliance on the information in this handbook. You should not act or refrain from acting, on the basis of any information included below but rather you should always seek specific legal and other professional advice.



Image : Billy Galligan

FAN OWNERSHIP : THE IRISH CONTEXT

The broad term co-operative can be applied to any grouping of people that come together for a shares purpose. The Supporters' Trust movement in the UK emerged out of such thinking and in the Irish context we have seen similar issues, though a number of different approaches have been used.

Bohemians Football Club was originally setup as a members club and has since retained that model, with all the members working together for a common aim. Shamrock Rovers, meanwhile, via what initially was a patron scheme ultimately assumed control of their club through the "400 Club" Members Club, which has gone on to become the Shamrock Rovers Membership Club. Cork City fans - through FORAS - set up an Industrial Provident Society, which initially was set up with the aim of developing and owning facilities that could then be put at the disposal of the football club.

Historically, co-operatives were set up to allow a means of providing benefits for their membership. They are essentially the expression of an idea, which is that people can agree to work together on an equal basis and share equally in the results of the work. It has been defined as a "self-help business owned and democratically controlled by the people who use its services", which is the idea of shared responsibility and shared benefits.

An Industrial and Provident Society takes deposits from its members with the aim to fulfil the purposes identified in the society's objectives. In the case of Supporters' Trusts the purpose, amongst others, is mainly to develop and promote the benefits of football in the wider community by encouraging participation in a local football club as the focal point for football within the community.

THE INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETY:

The most recognisable form of co-operative – or to give that entity its technical name, an Industrial and Provident Society - enables private individuals to band together and share assets for common purposes. An asset, such as property, can be owned by a group of people without any individual within that group having separate, severable rights. If you like, this is the perfect 'social' model of property: together we own everything, separately we own nothing. The biggest and best known in Ireland are in the agriculture and food areas but other sectors in which organisations using the co-operative model have made important contributions include housing, group water schemes and community development. Credit unions and building societies, which sprang from the same roots, are now governed by specific legislation.



Image : Peadar O' Sullivan

PRIVATE LIMITED COMPANIES:

A private company limited by guarantee is sometimes preferred over the Industrial and Provident Society model because company law allows multiple classes of member with separate voting constituencies. This creates a hierarchy of voters, which is obviously quite different from the 'One member, One vote' ideal of the cooperative society.

The key differences between a co-operative (be they incorporated or members clubs) and an investor-driven firm, which makes it particularly well suited for supporter ownership, are as follows:

- Decision-making is based on One member - One vote (or on other restricted voting systems, for example based on the transactions made with the co-operative).
- Return of profits is restricted and is normally proportional to use of the services of the co-operative.
- Accumulation of asset value is not always reflected in the value of shares.
- Shares cannot be exchanged on stock markets.
- Democratic structure.
- Nominal capital is variable, not fixed.
- Principle of non-distribution (or limited distribution) of reserves on winding up.

There are a number of different types of companies that are registered with the Companies Registration Office (CRO) and the Registration of Friendly Societies (RFS). For more information, see the additional Legal section in this handbook's annex.

2.2 - FIRM FOUNDATIONS : WHY CREATE A LEGAL ENTITY

“Liability entities protect their shareholders from any personal liability”

Once a company is incorporated, it becomes its own legal entity or personality. In addition, incorporation as a limited liability entity offers certain key benefits that are hugely helpful in the context of supporter ownership. Generally speaking, once a co-operative either becomes an incorporated limited liability or benefits from that status in another way, they protect themselves to a great extent. Limited Liability entities protect their shareholders from any personal liability over and above what they have invested (i.e. you can only lose what you've put in and your own personal assets and finances are not at risk).



Image : Eric Barry

In the Irish context, we see supporter-owned clubs generally using one of two ways to benefit from incorporation. Clubs such as Shamrock Rovers and Bohemians are members clubs that are wholly owned by their members. These clubs have constitutions and rules, which regulate how the clubs are run, are members of the FAI and are generally wholly-owned private limited liability companies out of which all the football activities connected with the clubs are run. This allows the clubs to be run in accordance with their own rules (which can be more flexible than the rules which operate in Industrial and Provident Societies), while also shielding the members from most of the liabilities associated with running a club - as these same liabilities are held within the private limited company.

The other option available is to incorporate the entity via the Industrial Provident Society model. This involves incorporating the ownership structure in a more formal way to a members club but carries with it some additional legal and administrative requirements. Co-operative societies have traditionally been forms of unincorporated associations. These entities occupy a middle ground,

somewhere between ordinary companies and private trusts and give a different perspective on the manner in which property might be held and used for the benefit of a group of people.

Once a form of collective endeavour becomes sufficiently socially significant (like pensions funds, unit trusts or charities), there is usually a call for a formal regulatory structure to oversee the sector, rather than relying on individuals benefiting from the service to protect their own interests through litigation. This is the case with co-operatives and their need to be registered.

Co-operatives in the Republic of Ireland are required to be registered and do so under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1893-1978. Unfortunately, the law in relation to Friendly Societies and those of co-operatives is not as developed here as in the UK whereby it is possible to form an unregistered co-operative that can hold assets and protect them from unintended consequences. A registered co-operative is organised as a corporation with limited liability. The corporate status and limited liability accorded to industrial and provident societies are acquired on registration.

IN THE IRISH CONTEXT, WE SEE SUPPORTER-OWNED CLUBS GENERALLY USING ONE OF TWO WAYS TO BENEFIT FROM INCORPORATION

CASE STUDY: FORAS

Contributed By:

John O’Sullivan, CEO of Limerick Football Club

Having a constitution and being governed by corporate laws or guided by corporate practices offers great protection for supporters in the sense that Trusts are often called into action in times of huge challenge, intense pressure and strong media attention, even if it is just local. There will be demands made on time and particularly finances, often from within the organisation, which - in the absence of strict procedures - can mean huge mistakes being made in error.

Taking FORAS as an example: at one time the Trust held an EGM immediately prior to Cork City FC Investments Ltd., who owned Cork City, being brought before the High Court on account of its debts. The officers of the Trust and membership in general were reluctant to hand over any money to the then owner, who had a record of mismanagement at the club, as it was perceived that the money would be wasted.

The owner requested a bail-out from the Trust after the EGM closed and it was declined, because we could not legally or procedurally authorise any transfer, in the amount requested, without the members expressly agreeing to it. No money was transferred and we were viewed negatively by many from a public point of view, but – simultaneously - our structures, rigid stance and adherence to fair play and democracy in our membership was respected, and offered a stark counterfoil to the practices going on within the club at the time.

Having legal foundations offers the officers huge support publicly, as the democratic nature of a Trust gives the spokespersons a genuine mandate on behalf of its members and supporters in general. It limits miscommunication, solo runs by individuals - however well meaning - because the intention of the entire Trust is put forward.



Image : Peadar O’Sullivan

As chairman of FORAS and later Cork City FC, I often commented that I had the easiest job of all, as my role was simply to reflect what our 700 members had instructed me to say. To stand before any officer of a court, agency, third party, creditor or association and know that you had clear direction and the full backing of a huge membership was a huge support in often difficult meetings and conversations.

Being a legal entity also allowed us more respect and a greater voice within the national Association. FORAS had fought a very similar path to Shamrock Rovers in certain aspects of our respective attempts to gain control of our clubs. We learned a lot from their experience and one aspect that became important was our ability to place ourselves as more than disgruntled fans or agitators within the media circus that Cork City had become.

While many groups over the years in Irish sport had tried to bring themselves to the table, FORAS was the first to have its importance recognised publicly by the FAI, when in Oct 2009, they published their intention to meet Trust, calling us an ‘essential stakeholder’.

“League of Ireland Director Fran Gavin, FAI Internal Compliance Officer Padraig Smith, and Noel Mooney of FAI will tomorrow sit down formally with representatives of Foras, the independent Cork City Supporter’s Trust, to discuss Trust’s general concerns and those with respect to the League of Ireland license for Cork City Football Club for next year.

The FAI is committed to the future of senior football in Cork and views Foras, the fan’s representative body, as an essential stakeholder in the future of Cork City Football Club.”

2.3 - SETTING UP AN INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETY

"The rules must, as a minimum, contain the requirements set out in the 1893 Act"

PRE REGISTRATION

A co-operative has to consist of at least seven people, who must draw up a set of rules governing the operation of the society. The rules must, as a minimum, contain the requirements as set out in the 1893 Act. The rules, together with the prescribed application form and fee, are submitted to the Registrar for examination and, once the rules are found to be in accordance with statute, the society is registered. Fees range from €250 - €300, depending on the form of Model Rules used.

There are a number of representative groups for co-operatives with whom the Registrar has agreed forms of Model Rules that can be used in the registration of societies. The Irish Co-operative Organisation Society Limited (ICOS) has agreed Model Rules for straightforward co-operatives, as well as co-operatives involved in horticulture, fishing, sheep breeding and group water schemes.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The original rules of FORAS can be found here:

> <http://www.corkcityfc.ie/home/club-info/foras/society-rules/>.

For the latest version, contact the Trust directly:

> forastrust@corkcityfc.ie.

POST REGISTRATION

After registration, a society must have its accounts audited each year by a registered auditor. A society must make an annual return to the Registrar by March 31st each year and the return must be accompanied by the audited accounts.

Failure to submit an annual return leaves a society liable to prosecution and also to having its registration cancelled. A society whose registration has been cancelled can only have it restored by applying to the High Court, which can be a costly process. Accounts must be submitted with the return each year, together with the auditor's report under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1893 to 1978.

If a society amends any of its rules, it must apply to the Registrar to have the amendment registered. The Registrar will register the amendment when he is satisfied that it is in accordance with statute. An amendment to a rule is not valid until it has been registered by the Registrar.



Image : Billy Galligan

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS FOR CO-OPERATIVES WITH WHOM THE REGISTRAR HAS AGREED FORMS OF MODEL RULES THAT CAN BE USED IN THE REGISTRATION OF SOCIETIES.

2.4 - OWNERSHIP MODELS : CLUB LICENCING CONSIDERATIONS

“The UEFA model does.. leave a significant amount of discretion to each member association”

While Irish law allows for all of the above models of incorporations for the football club, this must be placed in the context of the FAI Club Licensing Manual and the UEFA Club Licensing Manual upon which the Irish manual, and all licensing manuals in other football jurisdictions, is based. The UEFA model does, however, leave a significant amount of discretion to each member association due to legal and jurisdictional differences at play in the legal context.



Image : Tony Tobin

In order for clubs, be they supporter-owned or not, to compete in League of Ireland competition, the criteria within the Licensing Manual must be adhered to. However, it is worth noting a particular exemption exists in relation to Derry City FC due to the club's unique position whereby they play in the League of Ireland despite technically falling within the geographic jurisdiction of the Irish League. Derry City have been granted a football-based derogation due to their unique position and the club Licensing manual recognises that the legal entity involved with Derry City may be slightly different due to the legal jurisdiction (United Kingdom) they operate in.

The Club licensing system essentially allows for three different classes of legal entities for football clubs wishing to compete in the League of Ireland: Private Limited Company, Co-operative Type Models and unincorporated entities. Individuals cannot apply for a licence in their personal capacity.

Such models are deemed acceptable provided they comply with the other aspects of club licensing connection to the legal form. Clubs must sign - and indeed have the capacity to sign - the club licensing contract. The entity must itself either be a member of the FAI (Leg 1.02) or else the entity must be fully under the control of a member of the FAI. The entity must provide the FAI with a copy of its constitution documents as part of the licensing process. The nature and form of these constitution documents will depend on the model used by the entity e.g. Articles of Association in the case of a Private Limited Company, Model

Rules in the case of a Co-Op and the Constitution or rules of an unincorporated entity.

The entity applying for a license must also provide the FAI with confirmation of ongoing incorporation in the case of Private Limited Companies and co-operatives i.e. copies of the latest Annual Returns. In the case of unincorporated entities, they must provide details such as the name, address and legal form of the entity. (Leg 1.05).

As per Leg 1.07, an incorporated entity must register the trading name of the football club if that is different from the legal incorporated name of the entity. In the case of Private Limited Companies this is a straightforward matter that can be completed simply by filling out an application form with the Companies Registration Office (www.cro.ie). In the case of co-operatives, this process is far more complicated and involves considerable delay. As co-operatives are registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies rather than the CRO, a longer lead time is required.

The registration of the business name must be firstly put to the CRO, who in turn forwards the application to the Registrar for Approval. The Registrar confirms the registration with the CRO, which then ultimately issues the certificate required by the Club licensing process. Usually, this will also require a rule change of the Rules of the co-operative. This issue does not normally arise for unincorporated entities.

2.5 - INSOLVENCY AND SUPPORTER RESCUES

"..represents a fantastic opportunity for supporters to get a genuine say..in their football club"

There are three primary insolvency procedures available under Irish Law: Receivership, Liquidation and Examinership. Irish supporters have been successful in rescuing their clubs out of insolvency procedures and very often insolvency or the likelihood of insolvency is what provides supporters with the impetus to react and secure the future of their club.

Receivership involves a large creditor coming into the company that owes the debt and essentially taking that company over. This is done either by running the company in such a way as to try and recover the money owed or, more usually, the creditor's receiver will simply try to sell the company or its assets in order to try to recover the debt. However, this tends not to arise in Irish football as the principles in Examinership and Liquidations can also apply to receivership should it arise.

Examinership, similar processes in other countries exist such as Administration in the UK and Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in the United States, is the legal process whereby a company can seek to gain Court protection from their creditors for a period of up to 100 days to allow for the appointment of an independent external expert. This expert will seek to come up with a formal legal scheme that in most cases will see the company restructured and, with Court approval, write off a significant proportion of the overall debts of the company.

In recent years in Ireland and the UK, a significant number of clubs have used this process in an effort to free themselves from debt and allow the club to continue as a going concern. Although, legally speaking, there

is no limit on the extent to which creditors can be written off, football authorities have brought forward a football creditor-type rule that seeks to ensure that football debts (e.g. players wages) are paid in full, even if the Court allows for a write down of debt.

This rule, and other sporting sanctions such as a transfer embargo or a points deduction, were put in place in an effort to ensure that clubs could not gain a sporting benefit from entering Examinership. As a result, Examinership can have serious consequences; however, it also represents a fantastic opportunity for supporters to gain a genuine say or even a stake in their football club.

This comes about because during the 100-day Examinership period, the court-appointed Examiner needs all possible assistance in restructuring the holding company for the club, in addition to requiring funds to see the company through the time period. Early engagement with the examiner here is crucial.

There have been a number of high profile examples where supporters' groups and Supporters' Trusts have engaged very positively with the Examiner during this key period. If supporters' organisations are on-board, not only do the chances of a successful Examinership improve, but the supporters' group can try to position themselves as the preferred bidder for the company once it emerges from the process. If the supporters' group or Trust is on a formal and legal footing, the chances of gaining approval from the Examiner tend to be greatly increased.

The key consideration for the

Examiner and the Court is to leave the company in a position where it can have a reasonable prospect of survival as a going concern, and very often supporters are seen as the best bet.

AIRTRICITY LEAGUE: EXAMINERSHIP SANCTIONS

1. The club is automatically deducted 10 points upon entering into examinership
2. Further deductions of points will be levied on a prescribed basis upon the completion of the examinership process (see sample below and note this deduction to be limited to the total number of points the club has at the time of decision).

Overall % Debts Covered	Point Deduction
100	Nil
90-99	3
80-89	6
70-79	9
60-69	12
50-59	15
40-49	18
30-39	21
20-29	24
10-19	27
0-9	30

This sanction is part of a catalogue of sanctions determined each season by the Club Licensing committee. Therefore, technically it could change each year though it has not changed since it was first established in the 2010 season.

Irish Courts have shown a marked willingness to make special accommodations for Irish football clubs in applying these principles, and the Courts have made particular reference to the benefit to the community that football clubs provide as seen during the Examinership process of Cork City FC in 2008 where, despite strong objections from the Revenue Commissioners, Mr Justice Peter Kelly gave particular weight in his considerations to a letter from a primary school teacher [Right], which highlighted the club's community role. Once a club emerges from Examinership, the club is usually debt free and on an even footing - giving supporters a fantastic opportunity to make a success of their club in the process.

Liquidation presents a very different challenge to supporters' organisations and will present different outcomes. Liquidation represents the end of life for any company and in the football context usually comes about due to an inability of a club to pay its debts. Over the years many Irish football clubs have had their holding companies liquidated. However, in very many cases, this did not mean that football club ceased to exist but rather that the football club element of the holding company was transferred or sold to a new holding company.

With the advent of club licensing, this has become much more problematic more recently; however, opportunities still exist for supporters' organisations or Trusts to engage with the liquidation process and purchase the football club element from the liquidator. Doing so entitles supporters' organisations to claim ownership over the football club without having to be burdened with the debts. Club licensing rules require that a new licensing application is made though, and unless the supporters' organisation or Trust undertakes to honour all of the football creditors, a hefty sporting sanction will apply - usually meaning the football club will be relegated to the lowest league level available as

LETTER TO MR. JUSTICE PETER KELLY

I was introduced to Cork City in 2004 and my life has been changed immeasurably by it. However, I do not write to you to speak of my passion for the club. I write as a primary school teacher who has seen what Cork City can give to the community.

On our streets are children full of energy, passion and creativity but with nowhere to direct this in a positive manner. This club gives our community a focus and an outlet.

To the kids I teach, professional football seemed out of their reach. Yet, when the Cork City players brought the FAI Cup to the school last year, this perception changed. These players were people like them, from Cork or Limerick or Kerry.

My school is in a designated disadvantaged area. These children have tough lives, but they are just children, full of energy but with nowhere to direct it. At these games, they're just children again, enjoying every minute.

Cork City FC is not just a business, it is an integral part of our community, one with enormous potential to help educate the youth of today if given the chance to do so properly. Please give us this chance.

- CATRIONA BOYLE

happened to Derry City, Cork City and, in Scotland, Glasgow Rangers.

It is important to remember in the liquidation context that there is a significant difference between the liquidation of a holding company and the cessation of a football club. While the High Court can liquidate the holding company, only the football authorities can alter a football club's status. Take, for example, Monaghan United where the club dropped out of the League of Ireland in 2012 and lost the licence held by the holding company; however, Monaghan United still exists as a football club and is a member of the FAI despite the former holding company no longer trading as a football club. With this in mind, early engagement with the relevant football association is vital.

In order for supporters' organisations to best deal with any insolvency event, it is vital that they hit the ground running. In most cases, this means that the organisation needs to be set up and running before any insolvency event has taken place as an ultimate insurance policy. If a supporters'

organisation is only established in reaction to an insolvency event, it is usually already too late.

It is also important to note that for any event which results in a supporter rescue, where a new entity is established, this entity may not take part in any European competition for a period of at least three years, as in the case of Derry City. The wording from UEFA regulations (article 12, para 2) is as follows:

"The membership and the contractual relationship (if any) must have lasted – at the start of the licence season – for at least three consecutive years. Any alteration to the club's legal form or company structure (including, for example, changing its headquarters, name or club colours, or transferring stakeholdings between different clubs) during this period in order to facilitate its qualification on sporting merit and/or its receipt of a licence to the detriment of the integrity of a competition is deemed as an interruption of membership or contractual relationship (if any) within the meaning of this provision."

2.6 - THE RIGHTS OF SHAREHOLDERS IN IRELAND

“Shareholders... usually provide a particular type of finance to the company”

With a growing number of supporters-owned clubs and Trusts around the country, it's important that shareholders are aware of their entitlements.

A shareholder is an individual or company that legally owns one or more shares of stock in that company. Shareholders, who may or may not be directors of the company, usually provide a particular type of finance to the company, and in return, their shares are usually thought of as giving their holders two types of right.

One is to exercise control over the company, notably by selecting or removing the directors and setting the terms of the company's constitution and the other is to receive a financial return on their investment in the share.

The rights of the shareholder ¹ include those listed as follows. [Right]

THE RIGHTS OF THE SHAREHOLDER INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING

- Memorandum and articles of association
- Minutes of general meetings and resolutions
- Register of members, register of directors and the register of directors' interests
- Unabridged financial statements, directors' report and auditors' reports
- Unabridged financial statements of any subsidiary company for the preceding ten years
- The right to ask the court to call an EGM
- The right to restrain an ultra vires act
- The right to vote
- The right to receive notice of general meetings
- The right to a dividend if one is declared
- The right to a share certificate
- A members right to have his name entered on the Register of Members
- The right to an AGM
- The right to prevent the introduction of an elective regime (i.e. one shareholder dictating all company decisions)
- The right to require a copy of the register of shareholders within 10 days of the request subject to a charge



Image : David Caldwell

1. MyCompany.ie site (2009): <http://www.mynewcompany.ie/index.php/2009/10/shareholders-rights/>

2.7 - THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF DIRECTORS

“..it is essential that responsibilities of company directors.. are promoted”

Similarly, with supporters now becoming the directors of clubs and Trusts, it is essential that the responsibilities of company directors in Ireland, which are wide and diverse, are brought to wider attention.

Their duties arise primarily from two sources: statute (Acts of the Oireachtas and other legislation e.g. EU Regulations) and common law. Directors' common law duties can be summarised into three principles:

- Directors must exercise their powers in good faith and in the interests of the company as a whole.
- Directors are not allowed to make an undisclosed profit from their position as directors and must account for any profit which they derive from their position as a director.
- Directors are obliged to carry out their functions with due care, skill and diligence.

Directors' statutory duties² are listed as follows. [Top Right]

DIRECTOR'S STATUTORY DUTIES

- Duties as a company officer under the Companies Acts
- Duty to maintain proper books of account
- Duty to prepare annual accounts
- Duty to have an annual audit performed
- Duty to maintain certain registers and other documents
- Duty to file certain documents with the registrar of companies
- Duty of disclosure of certain personal information
- Duty to convene general meetings of the company
- Duties regarding transactions with the company
- Duties of directors of companies in liquidation and directors of insolvent companies

THEIR [DIRECTORS] DUTIES ARISE PRIMARILY FROM TWO SOURCES: STATUTE (ACTS OF THE OIREACHTAS AND OTHER LEGISLATION E.G. EU REGULATIONS) AND COMMON LAW.



Image : Ian Anderson

2. Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement site:
http://www.odce.ie/en/company_companies_responsibilities.aspx



3.1 - DAY-TO-DAY: OPERATING PROCEDURES

"An ethos of proper governance is essential"

The purpose of this chapter is to give clubs and Trusts a new way of thinking about the critical manner in which they conduct their business every day.

DAY TO DAY OPERATING PROCEDURES

The importance of consistent and ongoing good governance on a daily basis – whether for a club or supporters' organisation – is absolutely vital.

There is a fine balance to be achieved between adhering strictly to rules, implementing an organisation's constitution and members' wishes versus being tied up and restricted by too much red tape. An ethos of proper governance is essential as a result, and should be a factor in every activity.

In 2012, the Board of FORAS and Cork City FC undertook a review of its operating procedures, the responsibilities of officers and several general roles that were important for the Board to designate each year.

Please note the full Supporters Direct Supporters' Trust handbook being referred to is available online:

SECRETARY:

A full description of the role is included in the Supporters Direct Supporters' Trust handbook, but includes the following:

- To take, prepare, amend and store minutes from all Board meetings as well as General Meetings and the AGM of the Trust.
- To protect members' interests and see that the Trust's constitution is adhered to at all times
- To seek outside help if any concerns are raised
- To send all rules changes, made at members' meetings, to ICOS
- To deal with all correspondence to the Trust, including postal votes
- To ensure the Trust's directors are changed every year

CHAIRPERSON:

Like the Secretary, a full description of the role is included in the Supporters Direct Trust handbook but, at Cork City FC, the Chairperson's role includes:

- The chairing of Board meetings, the AGM and General Members meetings
- The chairperson is the public face of the Board of Management and represents their views
- He/ She has a casting vote at Board meetings and must delegate, while taking on overall responsibility
- Responsible for day-to-day communication with the CEO, outside of Board meetings, and ensuring all information is then passed on to the Board
- A chairperson is elected each year after the AGM.

FORAS and Cork City FC also has a Vice-Chairperson role. He/She acts as chairperson in the chairperson's absence.

> <http://www.supporters-direct.org/members-zone/handbook>

TREASURER:

Like the other officers, the responsibilities of treasurer are fully outlined in the Supporters Direct Trust handbook but include:

- To ensure that members are aware of the financial situation of the Trust
- A signatory for cheques
- Access to every account, to check details when he/ she wishes
- Prepares and presents financial reports at the AGM and general members meetings
- Has responsibility for changing access details to the Trust account. (CEO looks after Club account)

KEY AREAS:

The Board identified the following key areas, which should have an appointed Board Member to take charge of (but not be solely responsible for) each year: Membership, Community, Fundraising, Volunteers, Football, Infrastructure/ Training Ground maintenance, Correspondence & Transparency.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION:

The Board set up a members-only forum on a trial basis in 2013. Members had to register under their full name and all discussions were to focus on Trust and club matters. The hope was to allow members discuss more confidential Trust matters in relative privacy and to encourage better engagement with their fellow members. The Board also committed to issuing a summary report of its own meetings at the end of each month.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION:

The Board has its own private forum to discuss any arising issue in between its fortnightly Board

meetings. All Board members log on regularly and discuss matters up for decision ahead of time – to save time during meetings themselves. In event of anything urgent, Board members are contacted by SMS or by phone.

LINES OF COMMUNICATION:

Running of the club:

Chief Executive > Chairperson > Board of Management

Football Matters: Team Manager > Board of Management football rep (chairperson at present) > Board of Management

MEETINGS:

A new set Agenda for all meetings has been agreed. The Secretary sets all fortnightly meeting dates a quarter in advance and apart from the Secretary, only the Chairperson or Chief Executive can call a meeting of the Board outside of the agreed schedule. A meeting with the club's accountant is held, as part of a Board meeting, once a month. [Right]

It is the responsibility of the Chairperson to keep the meeting on track. The paperwork for all financial

MEETING AGENDA

- Previous meeting's minutes / Matters Arising
- Declare any AOB
- Club cash flows
- Correspondence / notable meetings (update from all Board Members)
- CEO report
- Football update
- Trust update
- Community update
- AOB

meetings is prepared and sent to the Board, via the CEO, by the Friday before each financial meeting. The agenda of financial meetings is set by the CEO, who will disperse regular cash flows to the Board and discuss the same with the Treasurer at least once a week.



Image : Eric Barry

3.2 - LEARN TO DELEGATE AND PLAN FOR SUCCESSION

“There are a number of considerations to make and review on a regular basis”

A recurring issue within many clubs and supporters' organisations is the heavy workload that can be involved with day-to-day operations. This can lead to problems such as exhaustion, members being forced to walk away because of the demands required and lost knowledge over time. Being aware of these issues, particularly in terms of governance, is essential and there are a number of considerations to make and review on a regular basis.

ESTABLISH FOCUSED WORKING GROUPS

Spread the workload by creating dedicated working groups for key areas. This has a number of benefits as it allows ordinary members to bring forward ideas of their own and develop them at lower levels of the organisation (thus preparing a pathway to stepping up to the Board in the process), while also ensuring that the knowledge base of the membership is shared and expanded – something vital for succession planning.

STRUCTURED HANDOVERS

All learned knowledge should be documented properly and included in meeting minutes, follow-up actions etc. - especially in areas such as membership maintenance, infrastructure planning and the club's/ Trust's contacts database. It is vital that all working groups minute their activities and engage in a full and detailed handover to any new members, and that these same handovers become part of everyday operations.

SMALL, OVERSIGHT BOARD

With a number of working groups in place, a well-run and organised 'oversight' Board with defined roles of responsibility should be placed at the top of the organisational chart, with all other groups feeding into it. This Board should largely focus on decision-making and higher-level policy considerations.

TRAINING

Offer free training to volunteers where possible.

CO-OPTION/ NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Be prepared to bring in or recruit skills that the Board or a working group does not have.

VOLUNTEER EXPENSES

Giving time to your football club is an activity many people love, but volunteering should be cost neutral when and where possible. If expenses are not an option, make sure that those who consistently

put their names forward do still gain something in return for their participation.

At Cork City FC, Board members are required to step down after three years, though they may seek re-election. This rule ensures a small turnover of Board members at each AGM. Fresh faces and new ideas give a Board a renewed sense of purpose, while ordinary members can nominate themselves for election safe in the knowledge that the ongoing support and expertise of former Board members will always be at hand. However, it also means that having clear club and Trust objectives and operating procedures – as well as a consistent presence in the form on your CEO/ General Manager - are essential to maintaining a cohesive strategy over time, one that will continue to reflect members' wishes.



Image : Billy Galligan

3.3 - FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

"The potential rewards.. outweighs all of the possible downsides"

Contributed By:
Simon Baily

Unlike other sporting codes, League of Ireland clubs and supporters' groups do not take enough advantage of the various levels of funding and/or supports available to them. In this section, we give a high-level overview of some of the opportunities that exist. It's also important for clubs and Supporters' Trusts to look beyond the likes of the sports capital funding programme to sources that focus on education, community and governance initiatives.

EU funding is often seen as an impenetrable and off-putting animal - heavy on bureaucracy and with a language all of its own that most people don't understand. Many people can even be scared and put off by it.

However, the reality doesn't have to be daunting at all. While it is challenging and there is a degree of red tape, the potential rewards in terms of finance, building of partnerships and expertise and the sense of achievement of doing something completely new outweighs all of the possible downsides. Also, there is help at hand, as there are people out there to help you with your applications...

So, what sorts of programmes are available? There are literally dozens of different EU funding streams, covering a wide variety of topics. For the purpose of a guide like this, however, we'll concentrate on the ones that are of direct relevance to supporter-run football clubs. However, there is one really important thing to note: at the time of writing this, the European

Commission and EU Member States are in the process of finalising the various grant support mechanisms for the next seven years, so what follows is a preview of what to expect in the context of the 2014-2020 funding period. The EU works on a multi-annual grant support system, thus giving a degree of certainty regarding the medium term availability of funding.

ERASMUS FOR ALL

ERASMUS for All is a skills, training and education programme. It brings together many existing funding streams in the areas of schools, higher education, vocational training and the Youth in Action Programme and it is envisaged that sport has the potential to contribute to its delivery.

The programme will focus heavily on combatting youth unemployment. There will also be an effort to help young people obtain skills that can increase their personal development and job prospects, including through increased language skills and the adaptability that results from studying abroad. The programme will support:

- Learning opportunities for individuals, both within the EU and beyond, including study and training, traineeships, teaching and professional development, and non-formal youth activities such as volunteering.
- Institutional cooperation between educational institutions, youth organisations, businesses, local and regional authorities and NGOs, to encourage the development and implementation of innovative practices in

education, training and youth activities, and to promote employability, creativity and entrepreneurship.

- Support for policy reform in Member States and cooperation with non-EU countries, with a focus on strengthening the evidence-base for policy making and exchange of good practices.

As well as these main actions, there are two entirely new elements in the proposals:

- 'Knowledge alliances' (large-scale partnerships between higher education institutions and businesses to promote creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship by offering new learning opportunities and qualifications) and 'sector skills alliances' (between education and training providers and businesses to promote employability by forming new sector-specific curricula and innovative forms of vocational teaching and training).
- Also a student loan guarantee scheme to help Master's degree students to finance their studies abroad and to acquire the skills needed for knowledge intensive jobs.

The proposed budget for this scheme is €19 billion between 2014 and 2020. The main contact in Ireland is the Higher Education Authority and all of their key information is available on:
> www.euireland.ie.

More information can be found at:
> http://ec.europa.eu/youth/erasmus-for-all/index_en.htm

TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

The European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (also known as INTERREG) fund partnerships for organisations that work across borders in the EU and in a number of defined fields. There are a number of different programmes available to Irish organisations. Here we'll concentrate on the smaller, cross-border programmes, which would be of potential use to Irish football clubs, north or south.

The Ireland Wales Programme, the Ireland-Northern Ireland-Scotland and PEACE Programmes have regularly funded community development and integration projects since their inception in the mid 1990's. The current proposals would indicate that this might be a possibility again. However, as the programmes are currently being drafted by the authorities, this is not yet guaranteed and people would be advised to check the websites of both programmes:

> www.irelandwales.eu

> www.seupb.eu.

What may be possible is some of the information below, which has been extracted from draft EU regulations. They are part of a wider menu of options that programmes are currently reviewing and we are highlighting material that is of interest to football clubs and Trusts.

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT FOR LABOUR MOBILITY

(a) business incubators and investment support for self employment and business creation

(b) local development initiatives and aid for structures providing neighbourhood services to create new jobs

(c) investing in infrastructure for public employment services

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND POVERTY REDUCTION

(a) health and social infrastructure which contribute to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, and transition from institutional to community-based services

(b) support for physical and economic regeneration of deprived urban and rural communities

(c) support for social enterprises - Education, skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure

Although programme budgets will not be known for some time, the latest indications for the 2014-2020 period are for at least a maintenance of the overall current budgets.

More information on the current proposals can be found here:

> http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/etc/etc_proposal_en.pdf

For further information on funding relating to Ireland, see the following websites:

> www.irelandwales.eu

> www.seupb.eu

> www.bmwassembly.ie

> www.seregassembly.ie

APPLYING FOR FUNDING : KEY DOS AND DON'TS

• Do:

Contact your local support officer. They are there to help and INTERREG offices are particularly helpful and client-focused.

• Do:

Seek support early - local offices can help you with the demands of the paperwork.

• Do:

Keep your expectations realistic - there's only so much you'll be able to achieve.

• Do:

Expect problems. No partnership is perfect - they're run by people and human relationships have their ups and downs.

• Do:

Ring and ask for help if you're not sure. INTERREG support staff, in particular, are there to advise and assist.

• Don't:

Expect miracles and things to happen overnight as the development of EU-funded partnerships and projects take time and effort. Expect that it'll take anything from nine to 18 months to build a partnership consortium.

• Don't:

Bite off more than you can chew. Not all organisations are suited to the vagaries of EU funding - the reporting and audit standards are quite high for example - but, if you're sufficiently well organised, have good project management skills and are willing to work hard, so much is possible.

TIMES ARE TOUGH IN IRELAND AND LOCAL FUNDING FOR WORTHWHILE PROJECTS WITHIN THE SPORTING AND FOOTBALL COMMUNITY ARE LIMITED RIGHT NOW TO SAY THE LEAST

LOCAL FUNDING MECHANISMS

Times are tough in Ireland and local funding for worthwhile projects within the sporting and football community are limited right now to say the least. The best places to approach for discussion are your Local Authority or Local Sports Partnership. The former has sport and recreation departments, while the latter has been set up under the auspices of the Irish Sports Council and are located in each county in Ireland.

The Irish Sports Council itself is also a useful repository of information and guidance regarding the availability – or otherwise – of funding. (www.irishsportscouncil.ie)

John Considine, of UCC’s economics department, believes co-operation, the sharing of expertise and work experience schemes are worthy considerations when it comes to outside supports.

“Given the way the Minister for Sport Michael Ring TD is talking about funding community facilities, it would be worth looking to co-operate in this regard,” he said. “This may impose an added level of co-ordination but it would be worth it. Moreover, there could be some innovative approach so that the impact of the co-operation might be minimised.

“Sharing expertise is vital and two practical examples would include the FAI and supporters’ groups facilitating the process of completing grant applications by identifying someone that has expertise in this regard. Secondly,

clubs might be encouraged to examine a list of successful grant applications published by the Department of Sport – in order to identify the clubs that got it right and go about making contact with them.

“There is also a lot of funding available for schemes that are encouraging people to go back to work as well. Clubs could perhaps consider offering some form of job experiences as part of courses available around the country i.e. event management, and the Department of Social Welfare and Higher Education Authority are two sources to consider here.”

EDITOR’S NOTE:

It is important to acknowledge that a club or group’s structure and legal status is also an important consideration when it comes to applying for local sources of funding. Co-operatives encourage commitment, loyalty and organisation and are set up in a way to make it possible to receive funding from community-focused funders such as Enterprise boards, the FAI, Leader initiatives and the national Sports Capital grants.

However, Irish football also needs to start making a stronger argument as to why its community and sporting plans should gain funding from the public purse in a time when so many deserving organisations are seeking assistance. Here is where good governance practices, community programmes (that are monitored, measured and improved on), supporter/ volunteer engagement, strategic business and

infrastructure plans, research from Supporter Direct on the Social Value of football (amongst other reports) and long-term partnerships outside of the League of Ireland community can make a crucial difference in whether or not your application is successful.



Image : Maurice Frazer

3.4 - FAI RESOURCES

“The FAI has a range of volunteer-related materials available online”

The FAI has a range of resources in a number of areas available to clubs and groups. Soft copies of many of the resources offered to clubs can be found on the FAI website:

> www.fai.ie

GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS

The FAI has a range of volunteer-related materials available online, including A Guide to Meetings, Policies for Volunteer Management and Recruiting Volunteers:

> <http://www.fai.ie/football-services-a-education/player-a-club-services/volunteers.html>

FACILITIES

The association organises various workshops throughout the year, including Pitch Maintenance and Applying for Funding, as well as workshops for those who have been granted funding. The following guidance documents are available for clubs planning to undertake any facility development:

- Your Club, Your vision
- Funding
- Natural Turf
- Artificial Turf
- Floodlighting
- Club House and dressing rooms
- Irrigation / Goalposts / Dugouts
- Funding Support
- Stadium Infrastructure Criteria

CLUB MARKETING / COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Touching on a wide range of issues, such as marketing, community work, communications and customer service, the Grow Your Club guide is a 'how to' guide for Airtricity League clubs looking to expand their off-field operations.

> <http://www.airtricityleague.ie/about/press-office/2111-fai-publish-grow-your-club-guide>

LEAGUE OF IRELAND INTERCULTURAL PROGRAMME

Both the FAI and League of Ireland is heavily involved in promoting interculturalism and anti-racism and more details of their work in this area can be found online:

> http://www.airtricityleague.ie/images/stories/publications/FAI_INTERCULTURAL_PLAN.pdf

PLAYER WELFARE

The FAI also has a broad range of expertise in the area of player welfare and any queries can be directed to playerwelfare@fai.ie. The following documents are also available:

- Officially registered scouts

- FAI Scouting Regulations (V2 Feb 1, 2011)
- Advice For Parents/Guardians About Trial Requests & Scouts
- Code of ethics – for coaches
- Code of ethics – for parents

The following services are also offered:

- The FAI works with commercial partners to establish agreements that will benefit the clubs directly, such as the “3” affinity scheme. A similar scheme was agreed with Airtricity.
- The FAI lobbies / liaises with Government departments for funding and assistance for clubs
- The FAI facilitates links between clubs and third level colleges (e.g. scholarship schemes etc).
- FAI FAS Courses – assist in developing players for clubs
- A series of workshops related to issues such as marketing, finance etc. are also organised each year.

These are usually done by direct invitation to the League clubs.



Image: Ian Anderson

3.5 - GET PREPARED : OBTAINING A LICENCE

"The seminar guides you through the application form and process"

IT IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL FOR CLUB OFFICIALS AND SUPPORTERS ALIKE TO GAIN AN EARLY AND IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF THE CLUB LICENSING SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR THE LEAGUE OF IRELAND.

Contributed By:
Éanna Buckley,
Licencing Officer & Club
Administrator at Cork City FC

Football clubs participating in the Airpticity League need to obtain a Club Licence ahead of every new season. Introduced in 2004, the licence maintains the standard in five key areas : sporting, infrastructure, legal, personnel and administrative as well as finance.

10/09/2012:
Email to confirm
Licensing Officer for 2013

FAI email asking to confirm who will be CLO for 2013. Email reply to confirm.

28/09/2012:
Licensing Manual and Support
Documents received by email.

Support documents include toolkits, templates and also a document notifying changes between 2012 and 2013 application forms arrive. This is extremely useful, as it gives you an immediate indication of anything that may have been unexpected or anything you will need to do differently.

02/10/2012:
Licensing Manual received by
registered post.

04/10/2012:
Affiliation Agreements

Meeting with Secretary of Cork Schoolboys League in relation to affiliation agreement for Youth Teams (SPO 1.02). The affiliation agreement with the Cork Youth Leagues had another year to run.

08/10/ 2012:
Licensing Application form received
by email.

Review the form and begin filling out. It's handy to print the form itself as that is the easiest way to review it while allowing each item to be ticked off once complete. Anything outstanding can also be highlighted. The PAD 1.01 Organisation chart can be painstaking if you are not used to using Microsoft Word or Power Point. Also, do not underestimate the amount of time that will be involved in getting additional paperwork signed, e.g. mandates and job descriptions. This is often the most time-consuming aspect. It is a good idea to put together a checklist of all supporting documentation and tick everything off one by one as this allows everything to be tracked.

09/10/2012:
Additional Application Work

Establish a checklist for any additional material, including the PADs (job descriptions & mandates). These can be left open-ended if required, which means you do not have to do them each year – though this is a recent development. Arrange to sit down with various people within the club on the various criteria, e.g. Chief Executive Officer and First Team Manager on the personnel within their departments. The sooner this is done the better, as you will then know who you need to contact in relation to signing mandates, getting copies of qualifications/insurance etc.

17/10/2012:
Licensing Seminar Invitation

All clubs receive notification from the FAI about a Licencing seminar to be held (November 7th in 2012). Licencing Officers are requested to attend, while other club representatives may attend if they wish.

(Continued on P34)



Image : David Caldwell

(Continued from Page 33)

The seminar guides you through the application form and process, which is particularly useful for those acting as Club Licensing Officer for the first time. It also highlights any changes and allows feedback from clubs to the FAI Licensing Dept.

25/10/2012:

Application Almost Finalised

It took over two weeks of meetings to get all the relevant mandates signed and all copies of required qualifications together. Scan a copy of every document that is signed for two reasons: it means you will have a back-up of everything on file, while the FAI also needs a scanned copy of each document on file so it saves them time as well. There will likely be a small few items still outstanding at this stage and it's simply a case of chasing people on a daily basis to ensure you get everything in on time.

05/11/2012 - 06/11/2012:

Application Finished!

Chase up the remaining pieces of documentation still outstanding. The application was finished on 06/11/2012, so I printed everything out and put it into a series of plastic pockets - one pocket for the application form itself and then one each per section. This allows you to double check everything easily prior to submission and also means it is well presented for the person examining it.

Submission - Important.

Remember to ensure you submit the application by registered post and ensure it is submitted on time. If you are going to be missing supporting documentation or if you have any concern, contact the FAI Licensing Dept and discuss it with them. In general, they take an understanding approach and will facilitate you as best they can.

Don't leave it until the last minute though, when they are most likely to be receiving a lot of correspondence from various clubs.

23/10/2012:

Stadium Questionnaire

The FAI send out a stadium questionnaire to be completed by each club. This is a new requirement and is extremely detailed. If starting from scratch, it would require a couple of hours at the stadium to complete. Fortunately, Cork City had a copy of their 2008 UEFA Licence Application on file, information which simply needed to be double checked and finalised.

24/10/2012 - 26/10/2012:

Affiliation Agreements

Received list of players from affiliated teams. All of their details then have to be inputted into the forms for SPO 1.02.



Image : Tony Tobin

3.6 - THE S.L.O. : A VOICE FOR SUPPORTERS

“The position is the first.. point of contact for any supporter that wishes to raise an issue”

Contributed By:

Joe McSweeney, Cork City FC SLO

The Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) is a UEFA and Supporter Direct-created initiative to bring fans to the table and ensure their voice is heard in decision-making processes at a club, national and international level.

ROLE OF THE SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICER

The position is the first designated point of contact for any supporter that wishes to raise an issue, opportunity or discussion with the club – this includes, but is not limited to commercial, social and security concerns. The SLO acts as a conduit to the club for fans on areas such as stadium security, the match-day experience, community project work, charity opportunities, commercial possibilities, and merchandise feedback. It also gives the club a single focal point for fans to contact and allows a club to seek feedback from their supporters as well as keeping them informed of every decision. The role should facilitate supporters being brought to the table to influence and create effective policy to help govern football for everyone.

The candidate picked for the role should be separate from the club and not be employed by the club in any capacity beyond the Supporter Liaison Officer role if possible – independence from organised clubs, associations or groupings should ideally be mandatory for the role as it's imperative that an independent view can be taken in representing all fans. The Supporter Liaison Officer's views should be expressed as a body independent of the club unless

specifically stated as a club policy or viewpoint.

The role should also have a set channel of communication to the decision making function of the club, and should be granted the necessary powers and independence by a club to perform their duties. The SLO should be given the same consideration as a club Safety & Security Officer in highlighting fan concerns and raising supporter issues as well as being included on all discussions in relation to fan safety and security. For more details about Cork City FC's SLO role, see:

> <http://www.corkcityfc.ie/home/club-info/supporter-liaison-officer-slo/>

CLUB REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICER

The success of a Supporter Liaison Officer at a club is dependent on the interaction and resources provided by a club. To help fulfil the role the following areas should be provided by a club:

- A specific e-mail address to allow the SLO to be contactable at all times.
- An identifiable Item of Clothing to make the Supporter Liaison Officer visible to security officials, police, their fellow supporters and all travelling fans.
- A position in the club's Organisational Chart to help define the role within the club
- A reasonable level of Access to Club Employees and Resources should be granted to the SLO, as well as allowing for the Use of Club Infrastructure when possible.
- A position in the Matchday Programme should be made available if needed for the SLO position.
- The SLO should be invited to all major Security Meetings and, at the very minimum, should be briefed on any Policy Changes made by the club if they cannot be included in the decision making process.

THE CANDIDATE PICKED FOR THE ROLE SHOULD BE SEPARATE FROM THE CLUB AND NOT BE EMPLOYED BY THE CLUB IN ANY CAPACITY BEYOND THE SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICER ROLE IF POSSIBLE

ASSOCIATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICER

The Football Association also has a role to play in the success of the Supporter Liaison Officer program. To help fulfil this, the association should ideally strive to provide:

- A Supporter Liaison Charter that should lay out the guidelines specific to an individual, association's and club's role within the program.

- A SLO Contact List should be generated for the league and distributed to the SLOs, security officials and club administrators.
- A National ID Card to allow easier access to away stadiums on match-day
- A standard Evaluation Form should be provided to all Supporter Liaison Officers at the start of the season to allow a consistent form of feedback to the association for every game. This data should be aggregated and analysed to highlight the issues common around grounds.
- SLO Co-ordinator Visits should be organised to help document and legitimise the program.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Official UEFA Handbook -

> http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/Tech/uefaorg/General/01/84/35/28/1843528_DOWNLOAD.pdf

Further information about the SLO project is available from Supporters Direct:

> http://www.supporters-direct.org/homepage/what-we-do/europe-2/supporter_liaison_officer



Image: Billy Galligan

3.7 - OTHER SPORTS : WORKING OUTSIDE THE FOOTBALL FAMILY

“Partnerships are an effective way to do more with less”

Creating partnerships and collaborations between football clubs and other sporting organisations is somewhat of a rarity in Irish society. Different codes are in constant battle against one another in order to attract players, spectators, and even volunteers.

Timmy Murphy, CEO of Cork City FC and a former President of Basketball Ireland, argues; “Sport has long been seen as a single entity, but it has changed from a spectator and commercial point of view”. It is this change that encourages the development of partnerships and collaborations within all sporting codes.

In times of economic downturn, partnerships are an effective way to do more with less. League of Ireland clubs can benefit from assets, knowledge and experience of other organisations and the creation of a mutual relationships with other codes also encourages dialogue and communication. Basic levels of communication can affect match night attendance by avoiding clashes with other sports.

According to Murphy, “When Cork City sit down at the start of each season and make out our home fixtures, we try our best not to go head-to-head with other sports. Our relationship with Munster Rugby is quite good, meaning our fixtures have not clashed within the past twelve months.”

On a wider scale, partnerships with other sports and institutions, such as universities, can lead to long-term projects. In 2012, Swansea City FC and Swansea University announced a joint training ground deal, allowing for the development of a ‘state-of-the-art training facility in Swansea’.

Cork City FC, likewise, is working closely with University College Cork (UCC) across a range of issues including training facilities and scholarships, demonstrating that the development of such partnerships can create healthy relationships across the community.

Working with other sports can also be vital in increasing awareness around issues such as the importance of physical and mental health to all age groups, the development of joint fundraisers and promotional campaigns as well as ensuring that it is the local community – above everything else - that benefits from the presence of a range of sporting clubs in its neighbourhood.

The ‘Mind your Mates’ initiative, launched by Redfm and the Irish Examiner in 2011 ¹, is a great example of how all major sporting codes in Ireland - including Munster Rugby, Cork GAA and Cork City FC on this occasion - can work together in a really positive way.

1. <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/health/listeners-urged-to-mind-their-mates-154336.html>



Image : Ian Anderson

3.8 - REACHING OUT : LOBBYING OUTSIDE YOUR CLUB

“Focus on building a support network around your club”

There is a prevalent feeling amongst many Irish football clubs that there is little help or support to be called upon from within the wider community. However, if you don't ask, you may never receive! In fact, there are a range of supports and advice available from Local Authorities, educational institutions, government bodies and NGOs across the country.

There is work to be done though, before you knock on any doors. The relationship between a club and a Local Authority or Third-level institution should be regarded as one of a customer/client basis. The requirement of customer service is to make life easy and convenient - which means making it easy to find the relevant information, to contact the right person, to get the appropriate service and to receive sufficient feedback and support.

When preparing for an approach to a Local Authority or Third-level institution, it is usually best to approach a general secretary for the department in which you would like to deal with. By doing so, it increases the chances that your enquiry/application goes directly to the person with which you hope to speak to.

When a meeting is arranged, it is important to be well prepared. This involves creating an organised and concrete proposal and having an in-depth knowledge of your subject. Further to this, having a medium to long-term plan is essential when dealing with such groups. By showing evidence of planning, it illustrates that the club is aware of the 'next steps' it will need to take.

After dealings have taken place, it is important to follow up on your actions.

Be consistent in your approach and remember that while Local authorities and Third-level institutions are obliged to interact with community organisations (as they are public services), they will need to see the potential in what you are advocating.

Focus on building a support network around your club. Ensure that local, national and European representatives are aware of your work as well as local business and community leaders. Build concrete arguments to support your club or group's cause - including community initiatives, youth work, a focus on healthy living, enriching your locality's facilities and developing activities for younger people, creating employment, using local suppliers, encouraging volunteerism and a community spirit. All of these are far more powerful than simply pointing out an involvement in the League of Ireland.



Image : Billy Galligan

3.9 - CREATING A BUSINESS PLAN

"There are two types of business plans - internal and external"

A business plan is essentially a map that describes how a business is going to succeed in its objectives and what it will need to do in order to achieve it. All Supporters' Trusts, especially those in their start up phase, need to set out their objectives and plan for what is to come. Without a solid idea of what a Trust is about, what its primary goals are and how these can be realistically achieved, it is too easy for an organisation to lose focus.

There are two types of business plans – internal and external. External business plans are written for people outside the organisation, most often for investor or a bank manager. An internal business plan is shorter and more practical, and requires less management time to complete. Internal plans are also more focused on problem solving and are action-orientated. Without a business plan, it is extremely unlikely that a start-up venture will secure funding from banks, local authorities or state bodies.

THE BENEFITS OF HAVING AN INTERNAL BUSINESS PLAN INCLUDE:

- Defining clearly what you want the Trust to achieve and the direction you want it to take.
- Being aware of what can get in the way of the Trust's progress, in order that you can work out how to eliminate or work around the issues.
- Understanding how all the different areas of a Trust's activities are contributing to its ultimate goals.
- Helping you assess the strategies the Trust is using, and whether or not they are working.
- Developing an implementation plan so that the Trust can go about achieving its goals.
- Having an outline of the strategic direction of the trust that can be easily explained to members, potential members and elected officers.

WHAT SHOULD GO INTO A BUSINESS PLAN?

- Commercial Strategy – Business strengths, weaknesses, goals (such as advertising, sponsorship), strategy, budget and position in the market place.
- Management Structure – Club board, board responsibility, aims (financial, commercial, playing)
- Financial Overview – criteria, income, expenses, overheads, cash flow, future projections
- Current Board Projections



Image : Tony Tobin



4.1 - THE IRISH SUPPORTERS' TRUST MOVEMENT

"FORAS owns and runs Cork City FC in its entirety today"

*"Supporters more than any other stakeholder group make lifelong commitments to their clubs and invest in them (economically, emotionally, and with time) on a long term basis."*¹

Nowhere is this statement more relevant or true than in the League of Ireland. Regardless of ownership structures, fans and volunteers have always been the lifeblood of Irish football clubs - saving clubs tens of thousands of euro each year through their efforts on match night and on a day-to-day basis.

Influenced by events at Northampton Town, where the idea of a Supporters' Trust owning and running a football club was first mooted in 1992 as well as the emergence of Supporters Direct in Great Britain, groups of supporters in Sligo, Derry and Belfast were amongst the first to realise the potential of the model. Today, there are Supporters' Trusts in Cork, Derry, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway and Sligo, with numerous other proactive supporters groups and clubs around the league.

The **SHAMROCK ROVERS MEMBERS CLUB** was originally formed as the Shamrock Rovers 400 Club in November 2002. It was initially run by the club with the aim of helping raise funds for the stadium project in Tallaght. The club

quickly became independent of the Rovers' board, however, and eventually took on a watchdog role as concerns grew about the long-term future of the Hoops.

"Members were wary - they wanted to see some proper direction for the future," club chairman Jonathan Roche explained. "I remember the day of a league match in 2005 when the club begged us for money to pay the players wages. We gave them a cheque for €30,000 and then protested on the pitch before the game - telling them to get out. We eventually had to force the club into examinership.

"Not giving the club support when they needed it was one of the hardest things we ever had to do. We had members crying and telling us we had no empathy. There was civil war - people simply didn't understand why we were doing what we were - and it wasn't a nice time at all. The Members Club funded the examinership process for four months to the tune of €300,000. We never had any intention of taking over, but by the end of the process - once people realised that the Council had taken over the ground - we were the only buyer left standing."

The 400 Club took control of Shamrock Rovers in August 2005 and has been running club operations

ever since. It is now the Shamrock Rovers Members Club and contributes its fees (€600 per member) to the club each year.

FRIENDS OF THE REBEL ARMY SOCIETY (FORAS), meanwhile, was launched in August / September 2008 having been in the planning stage for about 12 months. Initially conceived as an entity that would allow fans support the football club, the Trust immediately became a voice for Cork City supporters as the club went into examinership. The Trust made its growing concern for the long-term stability of Cork City FC public throughout a turbulent 2009 season before applying for a Licence to participate in the League of Ireland in its own right for 2010.

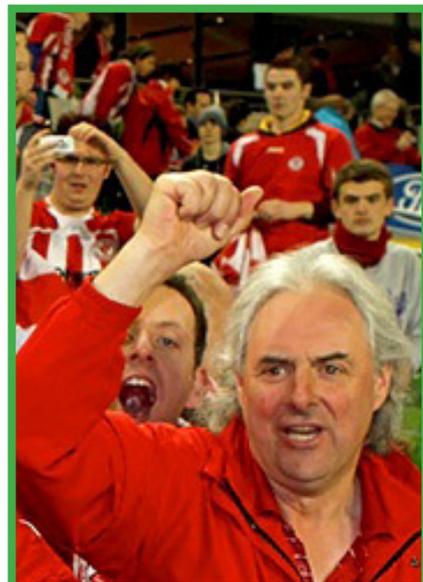


Image : Peadar O'Sullivan

When Cork City FC was refused a football licence on the eve of the new 2010 season, the club's holding company was subsequently wound up in the High Court and Cork City FORAS Co-op (Cork City FC) officially came into being. The Trust continued to support Cork City Football Club's underage teams and regained its assets – including the name - later that same summer.

FORAS owns and runs Cork City FC in its entirety today and is the lead organisation in Ireland for the 'Improving Football Governance through Supporter Involvement and Community Ownership' project, funded by the European Commission and in partnership with Supporters Direct Europe.

THE BIT O'RED SUPPORTERS' TRUST became the first registered Supporter's Trust in the Republic of Ireland's in 2007. The Trust gained a mandate for the initiative from both the club – which is a co-operative in itself - and supporters, before formally registering with ICOS and - with the help of Sean Hamill, of Supporters Direct at the time - were able to establish a respected legally based supporters entity.

"We spent two years researching and planning the idea," said chairman Alan Kerins. "We decided that the supporters club structure was dead as it had been relaunched five or six times going right back to the 1960s, and that the legal structure and organisation offered by the Trust was going to be a really crucial difference this time around.

"At a meeting of club representatives and supporters, we got a 100% mandate from everybody in the room after taking the time to explain everything, answer questions and stress that while the Trust would be the same type of legal structure as the club, it would also be completely independent. We have an AGM each year, we present audited accounts and we have also become somewhere for supporters to get accurate and prompt information about what is happening at the club. If you set

WHEN YOU GET TO SIT DOWN WITH THE CLUB AND REALISE HOW IT FUNCTIONS, IT GIVES YOU A TOTALLY DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW ON THE EFFORTS MADE TO SUSTAIN A SUCCESSFUL FOOTBALL CLUB

yourself up professionally, you will attract the right type of member to the cause."

The Bit O'Red Trust is satisfied with the manner in which Sligo Rovers is being run by its current Board but the Trust remains a "safety structure", according to Kerins.

"The club comes first, regardless of whether it means dropping back to mid table or not. We have committed to giving the club €1,000 each month or equivalent over the season - but we do so on pre-agreed terms with the club and do not deviate from these. When you're assisting the club to that extent financially, it allows supporters to have more of an input on club decision making in relation to supporter-related issues, and our members have gone on to become part of the club management board.

"When you get to sit down with the club and realise how it functions, it gives you a totally different point of view on the efforts made to sustain a successful football club and it also puts a lot of supporters age old 'issues' to bed. Regular communication with the club is key."

The fans behind the **DERRY CITY SUPPORTERS' SOCIETY LIMITED**, meanwhile, had seen the work of both Supporters Direct in the UK and also the Glentoran Supporters Trust in the Irish League before deciding to establish their own entity in 2008. There were concerns about the future stability of Derry City FC at the time and it was felt that by having such a structure in place and ready to act if it was needed would be a huge benefit.

"We saw what the Trust at Glentoran was doing and we could see the access to funding they were getting as a result," Kevin McDaid of the DCSSL explained. "It was an opportunity for us to do things outside of the club that would also benefit Derry City, but the attitude from within at the time was very much that the Trust was a takeover vehicle and some officials were very wary.

"The Trust focused very much on community work initially - there was no intention of trying to take over the club - and we also created our own range of merchandise. We put funding towards the club's academy and partnered with a local charity to raise funds for an educational orphanage in Kenya. When the club were drawn against FC Pyunik of Armenia, supporters - with the help of the FAI - were able to raise funds and send crates of equipment and clothing over to a local orphanage but we also knew we had to be ready to act if the club ever got into trouble."

Derry City were expelled from the League of Ireland at the end of the 2009 for breaching its Participate Agreement, but a new club - under the stewardship of Philip O'Doherty - were awarded a Licence to enter the First Division for 2010. The Derry City Supporters' Society Limited still exists today, though interest has waned as many members live in other parts of Ireland and the UK. It's also important to note the existence of Supporters' Trusts in the Irish League, including the Glentoran Community Trust.

Fan ownership in **DUNDALK** goes back as far as 2001, when the club became a fans-owned co-operative. It was not all plain sailing, however, and the club was handed over to private owners to ensure its survival five years later in 2006. The Dundalk FC Community Trust came into being in 2007 and played an active role in the running of the club - organising merchandise and concession shops, producing the award-winning match programme, running the club's website and contributing to fundraisers - all while representing fans on a number of issues.

The Trust became an Industrial and Provident Society in 2011 and worked with a local business throughout 2012 to facilitate the transfer of ownership of the club into new hands. The Trust currently has a number of positions on the interim board, approximately 300 members and continues to be a very active organisational tool for volunteers on and around match day.

BOHEMIANS FC is a members club and was founded on September 6th, 1890. A founding club of the League of Ireland in 1921, it has always remained in the hands of its supporters and, according to its own website, 'the democratic principle of *One Man, One Vote* is at the heart of Ireland's oldest football club'². Members voted in favour of selling the club's long-time home,

Dalymount Park, in 2006 but when the deal fell through, it left the club with considerable financial woes.

It was during this time (2011) that a group of supporters and members came together to set up the Gypsies Supporters' Trust. Its aims are inclusive - insisting that the club has to deal with its debt, cut its cloth accordingly and rebuild from the bottom up. Members of the Trust are now part of the club's management Board and Bohemians FC is now looking once again to the future, having been through some very dark times in recent years.

THE GALWAY UNITED SUPPORTERS TRUST (GUST) was founded in 2001 - though not as a formal IPS - in order to allow fans provide practical and financial support to Galway United. That role changed in the summer of 2010, however, when Galway United's true financial state came to light. GUST helped organise the club's largest ever season ticket campaign at the beginning of the 2011 season, with over 650 sold in total, and eventually took on operational control of the club for the year after reaching a formal agreement with the board of directors of GUFC Ltd.

During what was a turbulent year for Galway United, the club fulfilled all of its fixture obligations while match attendances were actually slightly up on the previous year (at 900) despite a horrific run of 23 defeats. The Trust

initially lodged an application in the name of GUFC Ltd for the following season (2012), before later lodging one in its own name entirely. Unfortunately, the application was refused by the league's licensing authority.

GUST has continued to be an active entity in Galway football since, despite not having a senior League of Ireland side. The Trust entered a team into the National U19s league in 2012 and has built partnerships with the Galway and District League (GDL), other local football clubs as well as local NGOs and the wider Galway community.

GUST has also been involved in discussions over the future of League of Ireland football in Galway and remains committed to finding a viable solution for all.

The newest Supporters' Trust in the League of Ireland is the **1895 TRUST**. It was formed by a group of Shelbourne fans looking to use the co-operative model to secure the future of their club while connecting the club into its fan base and surrounding community. Following an open meeting in October 2012, a mandate was given by over 50 fans to proceed with the Trust and a steering committee was subsequently launched to guide the group through the registration process. A name and logo were selected through online polling and the Trust was formally registered with the Register of Friendly Societies in February 2013.



Image: Pat Healy

1. 'The Heart of the Game' Why supporters are vital to improving governance in football' Supporters Direct Europe position paper pg 6.

2. http://bohemianfc.com/?page_id=1333



4.2 - THE COMMON LINK : MOTIVATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

“it’s about building a club from the top down”

A common misconception about Supporters’ Trusts - at least in Ireland - is that they are primarily established to enable a takeover or bring new owners into a football club. However, from speaking with representatives of the Shamrock Rovers Members club, FORAS, the Derry City Supporters’ Society Limited, the Dundalk Community Trust, GUST, the Gypsies Trust and the Bit O’Red Trust, the overwhelming motivation - at least initially - is to help and support the club management already in place.

“The members club was set up to try and help the club finish the stadium,” Rovers chairman Jonathan Roche explained. “People set up direct debits and committed to paying €500 each and it was only when fans said they wanted to take control of the members club and have no one from the board directly involved, that the first revolutionary step was taken. The Trust gradually became an agitator to try and get some direction, but we never had any intention of taking over until nobody else wanted it.”

The sense of having specific objectives to achieve was vital in maintaining a cohesive effort by all members and supporters in the initial months and years in charge of the football club. “To buy the club we had to raise €500,000 and we had already spent almost all of our money during the examinership process. We raised €250,000 in a week - through long-term memberships and loans - and that figure was matched by Ray Wilson, a fan in Australia. The whole thing kept people together and drove it all on.

“The members club still needs a focus to this day. Our membership fees go directly to supporting the club each year and members have

been clear that they don’t want to see anything like a clubhouse or bar established; if we’re going to build anything, it will be dressing rooms and facilities for our younger players.

“When we were saving the club and then fighting for Tallaght after that, there were very few other issues cropping up. Other clubs seemed to enjoy what happened to us, but you just bottle that and use it to drive you on. The desire to get back into the Premier Division and then have a home to call our own drove us on in the beginning. Now it’s about building a club from the top down, the hunger to keep on going and the desire for long-term security.”

A hope of becoming an entity more proactive than the typical supporters club was also a factor behind the formation of the Bit O’Red Trust. “The transparency offered by the Supporters’ Trust model was essential for us,” chairman Alan Kerins said. “The Trust is something for the future in case anything goes wrong but supporters want to be able to know and understand everything that is happening now as well.

“A Trust allows you stand back and see if everything is going right. You can have an objective view of what’s going on at a club, and a legal and organisational structure gives you more credibility. Your first concern is supporters’ interests - things like ground issues, ticketing, information - but it’s also really important to get the message out there that the Trust isn’t an extended fundraising vehicle for the club either. It’s much more than that.”

Providing support to Cork City FC was the initial focus for FORAS. It took on the role of acting as

guardian to League of Ireland football in Cork, something that was activated once the club experienced financial troubles from 2008 through to the beginning of 2010. The Trust is now guided by the principles of volunteerism and sustainability, while developing itself as a not-for-profit community entity.

FORAS received a significant boost in numbers on taking up a place in League of Ireland First Division in 2010, interest that subsequently waned as Trustees’ focus moved more towards the football club and its immediate priorities. However, having received European Commission funding as part of the ‘Improving Football Governance project’ and taken on a new Infrastructure project in 2012, the Trust is now enjoying a period of revitalisation - demonstrating the value of having ongoing campaigns and/or specific, primary focuses to ensure momentum at all times.

In short: the primary motivation behind a Supporters’ Trust – at least in the beginning - is to assist and ensure the long-term future of the football club it is associated with. It is essential a Trust is continually active – as that renewable energy will sustain both its profile and membership - that it modifies its long-term objectives as each goal is achieved, and that active democracy and involvement from members is encouraged at every opportunity.

The finest examples of Supporters’ Trusts in Ireland and the UK are the proactive organisations that take new issues, new campaigns and new targets on board on a regular basis. The membership of a Trust, as a result, is akin to a living, breathing organism that needs to be sustained and allowed to grow if it is to flourish.



4.3 - DEVELOPING AN ETHOS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

“An ethos of good governanc ecan only come from within a club or supporter’s group”

“Supporters Direct Europe believes that the involvement of supporters in governance at club and national governing body levels can provide a greater level of scrutiny, independence, accountability and transparency than is evident at present, and will lead to better and more balanced decision making in the best long term interests of the sport, and the institutions (clubs) that play such an important role in the life of supporters and their communities.”³

Football associations can introduce any amount of regulations, participation agreements and Licencing requirements but an ethos of good governance can only come from within a club or supporters group. Research conducted by Supporters Direct suggests that “companies run with a view to the long term interests of their key stakeholders rather than a short term interest in their shareholders are more likely to prosper.”⁴

Continual reviews of those long term interests, and what can done to make them a reality is crucial. Finn Harps, which is another example of a co-operative model in the League of Ireland, conducted a strategic review of all its activities in 2009 and included the following as its main priority areas:

- The need to restructure the club’s decision-making processes, ensuring clear responsibility and accountability for different areas of the club
- The need to spend within the club’s means, via realistic and sustainable budgets
- The need to focus more on underage and youth development



Image : Ian Anderson

- The need to play a role with other local clubs and leagues in Donegal in promotion and improving soccer in the county
- The need to encourage more people to get involved in the club, via sub committees, working groups outside of the Board, or in whatever manner suits individual circumstances
- The need to better manage our relationships with stakeholders, via improved communication etc.

Changes suggested included a smaller Board, where defined roles would be provided for the seven Board members (down from 15). Six key objectives were outlined for the following three years with details of how these could be achieved, while a longer term, high-level vision for the future was also detailed. A clear reporting structure was provided with clear definition of all Board member roles and working groups involved.

A similar process is ongoing at Cork City FC where a rules review working group re-examined the operating rules of FORAS in 2012 and came to the AGM in February 2013 with a number of proposals to make the rules more practical.

Recommendations included reducing the size of the board to seven, introducing a maximum three-year term for Board member (after which they must step down but can stand for re-election), and implementing an earlier deadline for members giving notice of their intention to run for election to the Board of management. This latter change will allow Trustees a greater amount of time to consider their choice if an election is required. Additionally, the Board updated its own operating procedures around Board business, finance and club governance.

CASE STUDY: GYPSIES TRUST

Contributed By:
Gerry Sexton

Formed in 2011 on the back of the financial crisis that Bohemian Football Club had arrived at, a number of club members got together and set about putting structures in place to help save it from going out of existence. Although Bohs had been a members club for 121 years, through a certain amount of apathy and laziness in the general membership over the decade 2000 to 2010 and the fall through of the land deal to sell Dalymount Park, the club found itself on the very brink.

Trust members not only agreed to help with keeping the smaller creditors at bay but also wanted to try and shape the way the club went forward by encouraging like-minded people to become involved at board level. With almost a complete new board in place and Chris Brien acting as President the club over the past couple of years, the Trust has managed to help stabilise the financial situation and improve - beyond recognition - the atmosphere among fans as to the club's future.

The club is far from being out of trouble money-wise. However, Trust members do believe that with the board that is now in place, sticking to sensible budgets and keeping members fully informed, everyone can once again make this members-owned club work again.

CONCLUSION

The experience at Bohemians demonstrates that ensuring proper governance is a principle that needs to be renewed and reiterated at every single Board meeting, every members meeting and every AGM. Good governance should be a consideration in every decision made at a club or within supporters' organisations, and meetings should always have the organisation's constitution and operating procedures to hand.

Minute taking, staying true to members' wishes and applying rules in the spirit that they were intended are at the heart of good governance – and it's vital that supporters remember their designated roles, responsibilities and professional experience when they step into a meeting. "Running a football club correctly has very little to do with football," Patrick Shine, a former Board member of FORAS and Cork City FC said. "The Board should focus on ensuring proper governance at every stage and run the club professionally like a business. Have your rules and your ethos to hand and let them guide you."

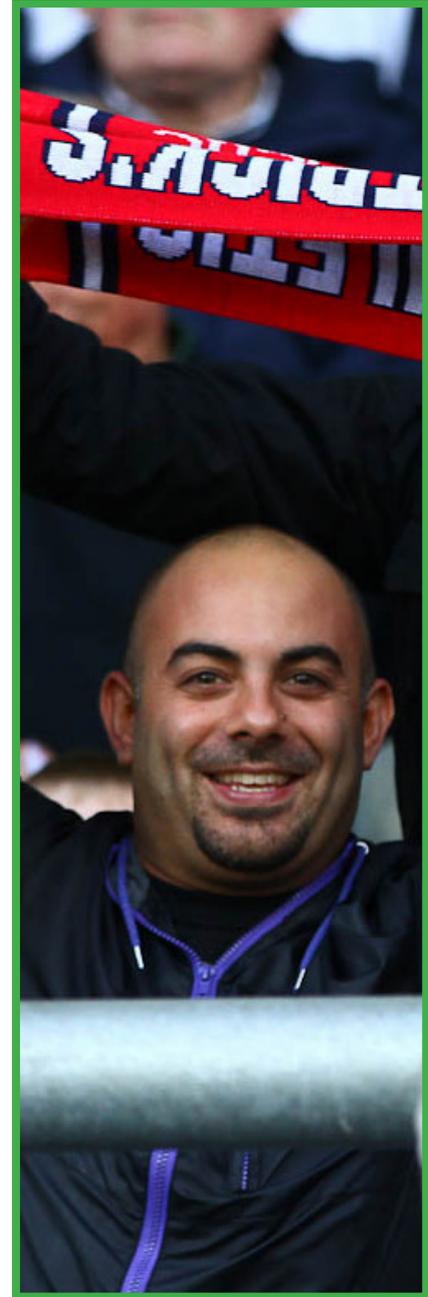


Image : Billy Galligan

TRUST MEMBERS NOT ONLY AGREED TO HELP WITH KEEPING THE SMALLER CREDITORS AT BAY BUT ALSO WANTED TO TRY AND SHAPE THE WAY THE CLUB WENT FORWARD BY ENCOURAGING LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE TO BECOME INVOLVED AT BOARD LEVEL.

3. 'The Heart of the Game' Why supporters are vital to improving governance in football' Supporters Direct Europe position paper pg 6.

4. 'The Heart of the Game' why supporters are vital to improving governance in football. Supporters Direct Europe position paper pg 11. Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) The Stakeholder Corporation: A Blueprint for maximising stakeholder value Pitman: London.



4.4 - CRISIS TIME: HOW TO RETAIN FOCUS

"Never be shy in asking for guidance and advice from other trusted sources"

Clear objectives, strong rules and a robust constitution will never be more important to a club or Supporters' Trust than in a time of crisis. Do not be afraid to take time and consider a decision carefully and in full, especially one that could have long-term consequences. Be aware that as a supporter one of your greatest strengths – your passion and emotion – can also be used as a tool against you and never be shy in asking for guidance and advice from other trusted sources.

CASE STUDY: NAVIGATING THROUGH A STORM

Contributed By:
John O'Sullivan

The central elements to focus on in a time of crisis are your core beliefs and objectives. If you haven't those agreed when the crisis starts, it's absolutely essential you sit down together as soon as possible and agree what they should be. If you don't know where you want to be, it's impossible to chart any type of a course within unfolding events.

The pressure to financially support a failing and flawed organisation, which is guaranteed or you wouldn't be in crisis in the first place, will be the biggest challenge as 99% of the time, you will be offered nothing meaningful or tangible in return. You have to be strong enough to say no and then deal with the fallout from that decision.

Crises create a huge strain on the individuals involved too, so looking after people's energy, time off and motivation is equally vital. No one will want to step away, even for a weekend, but they have to for their

undertaken is the saving of

WHAT'S VITAL, AND THIS COMES FROM YOUR OWN STRUCTURE AND OFTEN BY HOW LONG ESTABLISHED YOU ARE WHEN THE CRISIS HITS, IS THAT YOU REMEMBER AND CONSTANTLY BENCHMARK YOURSELF AGAINST YOUR ORGANISATION'S GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.

own sake and that of the club/ Trust, because bad decisions are more likely in stressful situations.

With Cork City, the bulk of the media attention was on players and their unpaid wages. Despite the pressure and underlying expectation that we should comply, we refused to do so - repeatedly pointing out that the then owner was responsible and accountable.

It made us unpopular with many and a very small number of members were insistent that they should be allowed to decide what their individual contributions be used for. What's vital, and this comes from your own structure and often by how long established you are when the crisis hits, is that you remember and constantly benchmark yourself against your organisation's goals and objectives.

Something that is often overlooked, however, is that you're usually managing a crisis situation as a volunteer, which is difficult and made moreso when the work being

something that is a shared passion and of huge social value and personal importance.

Focusing on people on the front lines of the crisis is essential. Supporters are hugely dedicated, hugely motivated and willing to put the club first, often for long periods. However, this cannot be sustained for long periods – people need to be able to recognise those kinds of tripping points.



4.5 - BRIDGING THE GAP : SAVING VS. RUNNING YOUR CLUB

“You have to work to make sure you get the money in”

Your Supporters’ Trust has fought the hard campaign, battled to save the club and is now owner and operator in its entirety. So, what next?

“It became apparent after a month or two that nobody was interested in taking on the club,” Rovers chairman Jonathan Roche said, referred to the examinership period of 2005. “A few of us didn’t believe in White Knights, so we knew we’d be safe as a club once the Council took on the ground.

“Running a football club isn’t rocket science, especially when you see how other football clubs are being run. It was a shock having to deal with the personalities in and around the business though; we were naive and we learned hard lessons very, very quickly. We had a points deduction and we did eventually get relegated.

“The examinership process wasn’t completely clean either – there was still a considerable amount of debt to be paid and we had people coming out of everywhere with bills. We still had the problem of no ground; however, despite the fact there was no help to be had, there was still a feeling that this was just the beginning of something for us as a club.

“Very quickly the everyday things of a football club take over. We had to find a new manager for the First Division, we had to try and get back into the Premier Division and we also had the court case (about Tallaght Stadium) to deal with. A sense of having something to achieve kept everything together.”

The learning continues today. “We put ourselves under too much pressure to pay wages over the last

couple of years,” Roche admitted.

“You have to work to ensure you get the money in and if it was a different business, there would be no emotion involved. We’re football fans at the end of the day and you’ll nearly always spend that little bit too much. We’ve been successful on the pitch but we’re still being emotionally blackmailed by people in the game to spend that little bit extra.”

A group of former FORAS board members – including Patrick Shine, Sonya O’Neill and Kevin McCarthy – had their own advice. [BELOW]

TRIED AND TRUSTED ADVICE FOR RUNNING YOUR CLUB

- Hire someone from outside with the requisite experience to run a football club
- FORAS was set up during a relatively peaceful time and had time to establish its credibility by the time the Trust took over the club. As a result, the FORAS board was more than qualified to run a club based on its professional skills and experience.
- Running a club primarily requires a measured and considerable approach. Don’t allow formal procedures to be interrupted by incidental news or events.
- Concentrate on getting the board and club organised and focus on getting all the details correct.
- The Board should, in fact, have very little to do with football. Instead, it should focus on governance, weighing up its options and making decisions. Don’t reinvent the wheel!
- It’s important to recognise that the process of running a club is also an ongoing one that will develop and change. The Board must allow each member to have his or her say, but then make a decision and act collectively.
- Have your rules to hand and let them guide you. Slow everything down and don’t be afraid to wait for a decision. Have clear voting procedures and don’t be afraid to recruit relevant experience or skills that are absent.
- Don’t try and achieve everything at once. Decide on two or three priorities, work on those and move on when progress has been made.
- The finances of the club should also be completed independent of the Board with the treasurer overseeing accounts on a day-to-day basis.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Contributed By:
John O'Sullivan

One thing that helped FORAS take the step from battling for the future of the club to running Cork City FC was the conscious decision to put the fight behind us. I decided never again to focus on Arkaga or Tom Coughlan. The only story worth focusing on was what we were going to do now.

STAFF

The single most important thing to get right is staff. Hire for ability and experience. Every club that operates on a national level should have at least one full-time employee. There will always be the risk associated with taking on contractors and/or employees but if a club is to function, it needs - at a minimum - a contact phone and email address that are manned and responded to within office hours.

Be clever about bringing in support staff. The TUS scheme and the Job Bridge scheme are amongst the initiatives I've made use of in clubs and once they're honestly approached and you are fair to the people involved, they can bring long term results. Clubs typically load wages into the playing side of the club. Even if a decent office administrator can be added for the cost of bringing in a decent midfielder, the decision on the office staff typically takes much longer to discuss and finalise.

Tying up with local universities or institutions is also essential. Co-op students can fill a variety of roles and bring value to the club, all while gaining experience from themselves in what is always a challenging environment which offers opportunities to learn and broad spectrum experience. Co-Op students can be brought in on the administration and the sporting side. Typically, the placements will last anything up to eight months over which the student will work 600 hours.

NETWORK

One recurring issue supporters that gain control of a club experience is the fight to demonstrate that they are more than just a collection of flag waving, emotional fans. So...

1. Talk to other clubs, nationally and internationally, and the association. If someone doesn't want to talk to you, so what?

Nationally

They've been doing it before you, they know the players and most clubs have good interpersonal relationships from years of dealing with each other. There are people at every domestic club who will gladly share good and bad experiences from which you can learn so one of the first lessons is that rivalry lasts ninety minutes and outside of that relationships can be developed.

Internationally

Look abroad. If you want to improve your community relationships, look at clubs out there who do it well, write a letter and ask can you visit to see them in action. If they refuse, you've lost nothing. Avoid the mistake of going with an ulterior motive: go to learn, not to secure a friendly.

Associations

Get to know the people you will interact with on a daily/weekly basis in the national association. Most are in the roles they do because they loved football and wanted to work in it. If you have issues, be straight. Like any other walk of life, straight talking can put noses out of joint in the short term, but honest and frank communication stands to you in the long term.



Image : Billy Galligan

2. Talk to successful local businessmen, without asking them for money

- Your region will have a group of successful businessmen who are approached for every single raffle, programme and table quiz by every sports organisation and charity in your region. Take a step back and ask yourself if a different approach would be of more benefit. Is it of greater benefit to get €250 for a matchball sponsorship from them or to spend €7.50 buying this person a coffee at a networking breakfast where you can seek and receive their input and advice?
- Ideally, motivate these people into a group which provides regular advice and direction in areas where you need it.

3. Talk within your club

- Hold regular, minuted meetings of the board with clear agendas and accountability. Even the act of getting people around the table will increase engagement and allows a forum for accountability.
- Ensure that your club accountant/financial is central to key discussions and is empowered to challenge. Sit down regularly to focus solely on the budget - it can be boring, but it's hugely important. Make sure financial decisions and accountability doesn't fall back on a single person, but is collective.
- Treat the club as a business and ensure there are clear, written roles and responsibilities, even for volunteer roles.

THINGS TO BE WARY OF

- Managing expectations of supporters. It can only be achieved through honest communication on public platforms but it's essential to take pressure off those working in the club.
- Every club, like every business, will have people who don't share your motivation. Some will have a financial situation, ambition or sense of entitlement that will mean they are working primarily for themselves, even if their work benefits the club. If the person is a volunteer, this can be difficult to manage - but remember your ultimate responsibility is the health of the club and if the individual is damaging the club, sit the person down and take advice if it's a new situation for you.

- Board/Volunteer/Staff motivation will very often be linked to on-field performances. Try to keep football 'chat' out of the boardroom. If the team is doing poorly and it is something that requires discussion or decision, set time specifically aside.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

- Ensure the website, social media outlets, posters, programme and printed items are professional and have a consistent theme. Make sure that when people see one of your images/print ads etc., is seen there are key elements which are readily identifiable and clear.
- If you have social media outlets, use them as a communication tool and engage with those that are engaging with you. Monitor analytics, observe and record which items receive the most interest and traffic and build in more of what people want.



Image : Pat Healy

TRY TO KEEP FOOTBALL 'CHAT' OUT OF THE BOARDROOM. IF THE TEAM IS DOING POORLY AND IT IS SOMETHING THAT REQUIRES DISCUSSION OR DECISION, SET TIME SPECIFICALLY ASIDE.



5.1 - GOOD PRACTICE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

"football clubs are consciously developing policies that permit interaction with their supporters"

INTRODUCTION

Contributed By:
Niall O'Sullivan

Due to the increased awareness currently possessed by all types of commercial enterprises of their wider social significance, football clubs are consciously developing policies that permit interaction with their supporters in both sporting and non-sporting contexts.

These policies can include projects on a global scale for the largest clubs in the world to very focused fundraising projects for local amateur clubs. For example, the community page on the Manchester City website displays a map showing projects based in Los Angeles, Freetown, Sierra Leone and Kuala Lumpur¹. In contrast, amateur Irish club Midleton AFC (Cork) show local events such as a presentation to a local hospital, a St. Patricks Day parade and several other fundraising collaborations with local charities on its community page.²

The question then is how to distinguish between community events that are largely motivated by the need for a club to raise its profile or brand awareness, often on a global basis, and community events that are inherently altruistic with the minimum commercial considerations attached.

League of Ireland clubs fall somewhere between these two extremes, as they are commercial entities with a limited geographical range that keeps them centred primarily on their immediate hinterland. The key difference, however, is how supporters in the widest sense are perceived i.e. whether the club sees them as customers or an inherent part of the whole setup of the club.

When a club starts to see the community in which it is based as an integral part of its activities, rather than as a subsidiary component that can be left on the margins, the overall social value of the football club quickly becomes apparent both generally and in more mundane practical matters. This value can manifest itself in cheaper ticket prices, community initiatives such as healthy eating or fitness programmes, charity fundraising and, eventually and ideally, in increased match attendances.

Also, the transition to a supporter and community-based club need not be at the expense of on-field success as shown by the presence of Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich and Schalke 04 in the 2013 Champions League knockout phase, all of whom are owned by non-profit member organisations, known in German as eingetragener Verein.

Saying that, it is still worth noting that having a supporters-based governance structure does not by itself guarantee good governance as evidenced by Borussia Dortmund reaching the edge of bankruptcy in the summer of 2005.

GOOD PRACTICE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The basic requirement to developing a well-integrated community policy is for the club to be aware of and listen to the needs of those groups or individuals with whom the club interacts. When the attitudinal transition has been made, it is also necessary for the club to deliberately quantify its community activities - both to demonstrate their value and assess their effectiveness.

In addition, an awareness of the potential barriers in realising the club's social value is required in order that appropriate strategies can be implemented. At the most basic level, the traditional model of private football club ownership and the more recent corporate ownership model both intrinsically exclude meaningful integration of the club and its community. A supporters-owned club does not have this fundamental obstacle to club-community alignment nor does it possess the potentially ulterior motives often associated with a fully commercial enterprise.

The scope of any club's community activities can be maximised by having as wide a definition as possible of what a community is. The natural constituents of this set - supporters, charities, schools and youth groups - need to be consciously augmented by interacting with business interests, tourism organisations, politicians and any other local entities. It is often possible to visualise the different components of any club's community by viewing the various group locations at home games. In different areas of the ground there may be 'ultras', regular supporters, a special needs section, season ticket holders, corporate sponsors and away supporters.

A further 'community' with which a club has to interact with is the general group of sports professionals that must be employed either directly or indirectly. This group includes the various team managers, players, physiotherapists and ancillary support staff. Failure to engage in a fair and honest way in relation to contracts and conditions of employment can result in it being more difficult for the club to secure the staff that it needs to succeed. However, when this relationship is satisfactory, the playing staff can become an invaluable asset when trying to establish and maintain a successful community policy.

All of a club's activities are influenced by the amount of finance available, so with regard to the specific area of fundraising, it is necessary for the club to be aware that a balance needs to be found between its own requirements and those of potentially competing local charities. Joint collaborative ventures may be the best approach to adopt in order to avoid such potential difficulties. However, the club must be prepared to devote resources - including finance and staff - if an effective community strategy is to be implemented.

At "The Heart of the Game – Why Supporters are vital to football" conference, held in Cork in November 2012, the common features of good community policies were outlined and discussed by a variety of speakers, including John Kennedy of Cork City FC & FORAS as well as Phil Frampton of FC United (FCUM) in the UK. A recurring theme through the entire discussion was the absolute requirement for clubs to be aware of the needs of their community. This awareness should be used to more effectively focus club activities on what was both current and relevant to the community itself.

The range of potential projects is very wide from simple match day events to ongoing long-term collaborations with local groups

The common prerequisite is for the club to have access to individuals that are involved in as wide a range of community activities as possible. It may be necessary for the club to consciously attempt to attract supporters, board members or volunteers from each subsection of the community that it wants to work with. However, broadening the club's appeal outside its traditional support base and geographic boundaries can lead to tensions - due to the operational changes that such actions brings. If wide community appeal is to be more than a rhetorical position though, adaptability and acceptance of change has to become the club's default approach.

A crucial part of any club's community activities must also be regular interaction with as wide a range of charities as possible, paying particular attention to those that have a direct relationship with the club. Initiatives such as these can be joint efforts involving other groups and sporting organisations in order to widen the appeal of any actual projects that may be undertaken.

It is also important for clubs and groups to reach out into the wider football family. Building positive and beneficial relationships with provincial football associations (such as the Munster Football Association) as well as schoolboy, junior and women's leagues is essential, as sharing learned knowledge and experiences can create long-term and mutually-beneficial working practices - improving many of the current fraught relationships over time. Wexford Youths, for instance, have made establishing a better relationship with local schoolboy and district leagues in their county a priority.



Image : Tony Tobin

1. Manchester City Official website. <http://www.mcfc.com/Community/Community>
2. Midleton AFC official website: <http://www.midletonfc.com/club/community.html>



5.2 - COMMUNITY PROJECTS: GETTING STARTED

“..appreciative of that same support from both the club and the general public”

Clubs can undertake a wide range of projects ranging from hospital, school or day care visits to awareness campaigns around issues such as racism and collaborative fundraising with local charities. It may be instructive to take actual examples of community projects across the broad spectrum of football clubs outlined above.

The global reach and need to have outreach programmes is well illustrated by Inter Milan's Project InterCampus Estero, which is working to eradicate sleeping sickness disease in the equatorial rain forest of the Congo. Support was forthcoming from Inter when the club became aware that the tsetse fly, which is a carrier of the parasite that causes sleeping sickness in humans and nagana in livestock, is attracted to the club's blue and black shirts. Thousands of shirts were donated and made into fly traps, thereby significantly reducing infections and consumption of expensive drugs in the forest savannah around the Inzia, a tributary of the River Congo.

The larger clubs can generate community projects with a global reach but they also have projects that are well within the scope of smaller clubs. Such an example is Borussia Dortmund's policy of giving 30 free tickets for each game to long-term unemployed people among their supporters. A similar initiative, mentioned at the Heart of the Game conference by John Kennedy, was Cork City FC's support for the Vita Cortex workers during their industrial dispute (2011-2012) - the only cost being the effort involved in meeting the workers. This demonstration of support showed that the club was not only aware of local events but was also prepared to support the workers' fight to secure

their legal entitlements. When John spoke to some of the workers at a subsequent match at Turner's Cross, they were very appreciative of that same support from both the club and from the general public.

A comparable theme was emphasised by Phil Frampton of FCUM in the way that his club is involved in lessening the difficulties encountered by various minorities when attending matches in England. He also pointed out that existing initiatives by other bodies can be adapted to suit a club's particular ethos, giving the example of FCUM's 'People United Day', which emphasises cohesion rather division.

Other FCUM initiatives include 'Youth United', which celebrates people's achievements and not just those that are football-related, 'Senior United Day' (over 50s go free), 'A woman's place is at the match' (where women go free), and 'Big Coat Day', which sees supporters bring winter jackets to the ground for charity, and illustrates the eclectic nature of the club's support. A financial cost, however, cannot be avoided in all situations and FC United spend 20% of the club's turnover on community projects and initiatives each year.

An alternative perspective was offered by the experience of GUST - who are in a different situation to that of Cork City FC and FCUM in that they represent a club that has, at least temporarily, ceased to be actively involved in the League of Ireland at senior level. Despite this setback, they are still active in their community, regularly hold fundraising events and entering a team in the national U19 league - which illustrates the mutual benefit for a club to be deeply integrated into its local community. When a club is successful, it may seem that

the community from which it draws support is relatively unimportant but once playing success wanes, as it inevitably does, the importance of being well regarded in that same community is of paramount importance to any rejuvenation project.

An example of a more traditional route for a Supporters' Trust to take is that of the Gypsies Trust (Bohemians FC). The Trust was established with the intention of being a counter balance to some of the club's previous boards and a return to greater principles of internal governance within the club has also seen a significantly greater amount of community-based activity since 2012 including visits to prisons, hospitals and schools, which are now undertaken on a regular basis. The seachange has also seen more external groups and organisations welcomed into the club to use the facilities that are available at Dalymount Park.

Another particularly good example of a club engaging in a very relevant initiative is a poster competition organised in Donegal by Finn Harps. Focusing on a general theme of road safety, this joint initiative between the club, Donegal County Council, Donegal Road Safety Working Group and the county's primary schools involved a competition for primary school children to design a road safety poster, with the winning poster being displayed on an advertising hoarding at Finn Park. This project confronted, in a meaningful way, the relatively high rate of fatal road accidents that occur annually in Donegal and does so by involving a wide range of individuals and organisations in the local community.

5.3 - MAKE IT COUNT : MEASURING A PROJECT'S SUCCESS

"Performance indicators must be consistent"

A key part of any community initiative must be a conscious attempt to quantify its effectiveness by whatever means are available and appropriate to it. Some initiatives are directly compatible with a straightforward empirical approach but many others are far less so for a variety of reasons. Even with projects that are difficult to quantify, it is necessary to undertake some assessment as it can provide the club with feedback on where its resources are being deployed. In addition, being able to show sponsors where their funding is being used, resulting in further non-commercial benefits, can be of great value in extending that funding or securing new sources of backing.

Possibly the most readily quantified community initiative is the distribution of tickets to schools, sponsors and other relevant groups. The most direct means of quantifying the effectiveness of such projects is via the ticketing system used for home games at Cork City FC, where the use of distributed tickets can simply be counted. With this information, an informed judgement can be made on whether to extend or discontinue the ticket allocation to specific sub-groups. This approach is best suited to the automatic ticket scanning systems in use in some grounds but with a reasonable amount of careful ticket collection, it can also be done manually.

There are a wide range of other projects whose effectiveness is not as readily quantified. Many of these fall into the category of projects where a relatively small number of people benefit, but for those that do see results, the knock on effectives can be very significant. For example, the above mentioned road safety



Image : Peadar O' Sullivan

project organised by Finn Harps has not ended all traffic accidents in Donegal and quantifying the number of accidents avoided due to the project is not possible, but for every individual that it may have helped to avoid being involved in an accident, the benefits are profound.

A further method of quantifying the effectiveness of a club's community policy is to track the number of external requests for collaborative initiatives that the club regularly receives. The rationale being that if the club has a well-structured community policy, then other organisations in the area will notice its effectiveness and will see the potential benefits of collaboration.

Changes in the number of regular approaches can also be used as an ongoing means to assess new initiatives. Cork City FC, for example, had filled their schools visits schedule from March to July 2013 less than 24 hours after issuing an

invite for schools to apply.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Regardless of the monitoring or measuring method used, all community activities and initiatives must be tracked and then reviewed as to their effectiveness.

Performance indicators must be consistent and all feedback should be used to both improve the impact of the project and its outcomes as well as ensuring the club or group's resources are being used as appropriately as possible.



5.4 - CHARITY PARTNERS : GIVE AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

"..appreciative of that same support from both the club and the general public"

In the words of Phil Frampton of FC United of Manchester, a healthy football club cannot exist without a healthy community – and there are many different ways in which League of Ireland clubs and supporters groups can give back to the local and national organisations that help our communities day in day out.

During the summer of 2012, Cork City FC organised a food collection for one of the oldest charities in the city, Cork Penny Dinners. The charity had seen a huge increase in demand for its meal service in the city since the beginning of the economic downturn and is now feeding over 1,000 people a week in return for a small coin (if possible).

Conscious of not always asking supporters for cash donations and of wanting to support an essential local entity, Cork City fans and supporters attending games against Watford, a Manchester United XI and a league game against Shelbourne were asked to bring one item of non-perishable food with them to the ground. The response was enormous with over six full shopping trolleys' worth of food given over to the charity at the end of the week.

The club went on to announce Cork Association for Autism as its Charity Partner for 2013. The organisation provides supports for adults with autism and asperger syndrome in the county and helps them live as independent a life as possible.

The one-year agreement between Cork City FC and CAA includes the following objectives:

- To allow CAA engage with the core community involved with Cork City FC on a daily and weekly basis i.e. the people of Cork city and county

- It was important that any Charity Partner would enhance the brand reputation of CAA and help achieve greater credibility and awareness in the greater community of the work that CAA carries out.
- The partnership had to be seen as an important extension of both organisations' ethos and branding. It was an important statement of how the organisation sees itself and, overall, might be important in attracting corporate sponsorship in a competitive environment. It could also be an important element in attracting other partners that might make a contribution to be associated with CAA.
- The partnership was also considered a medium for fundraising towards the CAA, by helping and encouraging Cork City FC supporters to support their club's chosen charity partner.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES INCLUDE :

- Marathon partnership to engage with post primary schools in Cork city
- Bucket collections at key matches.
- St. Patrick's Day Parade – CAA walking with CCFC in order to raise awareness and community support.
- Publicity Photographs with players and mascot and schools and clubs involving Cork City FC and CAA.



Image : Pat Healy



6.1 - THE LEAGUE OF IRELAND : AN ECONOMIST'S VIEW

"The problem is not talent but the business model"

Contributed By:
Robert Butler,
University College Cork

Since the foundation of the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) in 1921, the domestic league has, for all purposes, acted as a regional league. Unlike many international leagues, which today see their iconic players playing in the world's best leagues, Ireland experienced the exportation of its best talent long before the advent of Sky, the Premier League or Champions League. In fact, the League of Ireland has long been equivalent to the lower English leagues – promising talent, cherry-picked by big British clubs with the compensation offered in return often exploiting the diminished bargaining power and financial insecurity of those same lower league clubs.

Since the advent of live televised English football in Ireland, the domestic game has been viewed somewhat as an inferior good. Attendance figures, which experienced a peak during the 1950s and early 1960s, have slowly declined, culminating in record low attendances during the 1980s. Since then, repeated restructuring of domestic competitions have sought to bring people back to the domestic game. The exportation of Irish players to Britain certainly

hasn't helped this endeavour. Similar cultures, comparable approaches to playing football and geographic proximity to Britain go much of the way to explaining the social reasons behind the 'talent drain' to our near neighbour.

Coupled with this are economic reasons – a massive financial mismatch between clubs on each side of the Irish Sea, the most obvious. Vastly superior footballing infrastructure, opportunities and most importantly salaries, results in the annual exportation of the brightest Irish talent to towns and cities across Britain.

Today, every League of Ireland club faces a challenge to survive. Almost annually a League of Ireland club goes out of business due to lack of demand for what it sells – live football. In 2012 Monaghan United left the league. This club can be added to a growing list that includes the likes of Dublin City, Galway United, Kildare County, Kilkenny City and Sporting Fingal. Yet despite this, some of the greatest Irish players of the past two decades have played in the League of Ireland. Roy Keane, Paul McGrath, Kevin Doyle and Shane Long to name but a few.



Image : Billy Galligan

The problem is not talent but the business model. Historically, clubs have adopted a top-down approach. Clubs are run year-to-year (at best). Covering current costs is the sole end of all financial operations. This leads to the boom-bust cycle many have experienced over the past two decades, with almost every club threatened with bankruptcy.

The opposite approach is actually required – building infrastructure from the bottom up. Currently, financial impediments prevent this. Investment in capital, not current, expenditure is required. Building better youth academies, training facilities and stadia should ensure the most talented players stay in the domestic league for longer.

This approach is similar to what happens in other smaller European leagues, with teams from Denmark, Belgium and Norway regularly qualifying for the Champions' League group stages. The best players will travel to the best leagues, but only after a longer stay in the domestic league and for a higher price. Furthermore, players will be encouraged to return at the end of their careers to the domestic league if training and stadium facilities match those in Britain.

However, only a seismic paradigm shift in governance structures will allow clubs to move from the current top down to the bottom up approach. The first step on this road is an understanding of current and potential customers.

Waterford United are now engaging in this process. Over the first four months of the 2013 Airtricity League season a survey of both current fans and those that do not currently attend the RSC was carried out as part of an extensive investigation.

The objective is to get to know fans, and more importantly, non-fans better. The fan survey, administered at home league games, captures information on demographics such as age, gender, employment status and data on the match day experience. The non-fan survey is aiming to understand why potential fans stay away from the RSC.

The knock-on effects of this work are potentially massive. A vibrant and well supported domestic league could create hundreds of full-time jobs and generate far greater tax revenue for the government than is currently yielded, not to mention the pride at seeing Irish club teams compete at Europe's top table as equals. There is nothing innate about Irish football clubs that prevents them from excelling on a European stage – the only obstruction is the current business model. A change in this can lead to a sea change in domestic football in this country.



Image : David Caldwell

THE OBJECTIVE IS TO GET TO KNOW FANS, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, NON-FANS BETTER. THE FAN SURVEY, ADMINISTERED AT HOME LEAGUE GAMES, CAPTURES INFORMATION ON DEMOGRAPHICS SUCH AS AGE, GENDER, EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND DATA ON THE MATCH DAY



6.2 - CASE STUDY : THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

“We could tell they were genuine sports people with the best interests of CCFC at heart”

League of Ireland clubs are predominantly community-orientated businesses and sporting organisations. Their presence in a particular locality helps define the image of the club and also the target audience from which it hopes to attract supporters and sponsors. From a business perspective, however, the focus has moved on from how much a club can help a business ‘sell’ its products or services to how it might help the same companies engage with its local community.

National food producer Clonakilty Blackpudding came on board with Cork City FC in 2011, having been convinced by the new approach to football the club was taking. John Gallagher takes up the story...

“Clonakilty Blackpudding has always been a family-owned company based in West Cork. We’ve never aspired to being that big corporate entity which other organisations like to portray themselves as. We’ve a small and tight management structure, we consider ourselves a family and we treat employees and customers properly and fairly – that’s what sets us apart.

“As result, when we look for ways to market ourselves, we prefer going into partnership, rather than advertising on a national basis. The deal has to be right for us as a company and when the opportunity came up for us to work with Cork City FC at the beginning of 2011, we felt it was a perfect match because of that family-style ethos.

Once we understood how the club was being operated by FORAS - with everybody involved and the members themselves running the club - we felt it was an ideal fit and we believed we would work well



Image : Cork City FC

together - both for our own good and the good of Cork City.”

The Clonakilty Blackpudding team met with representatives of the club and Trust at Turner’s Cross, an initial meeting that left a lasting impression. “Two things stood out for us. The first was the structure they laid out - One Person, One Vote - and how it essentially was owned by the man on the street. The other thing that stood out that day was their honesty and integrity. They spoke from the heart. We could tell that they were genuine sports people with the best interests of Cork City FC at heart.

“We were very happy after the first 12 months of the agreement. We felt it worked very well for us. Alongside the club, we have really driven the hospitality area on match night. We have provided food not just for guests of the club, but the general public as well. Having our people in the ground and the smell of our food products in the air has had real tangible benefits - we’ve even had people come back and tell us that they’ve seen us at Turner’s Cross and

“We’re involved with a number of sporting organisations, but the difference with Cork City FC is that the owners are involved right there with us. You are literally sitting beside them at a match. I brought my Dad along one night and we had a conversation with someone that was a FORAS member and Dad couldn’t believe you could actually own a share in the club.

We’re very impressed by the way that Cork City FC do their business - that’s what attracted us in the first day - and we haven’t been disappointed in how it’s panned out.”

To find out moer about Clonakilty Blackpudding, visit :

> www.clonakiltyblackpudding.ie



6.3 - FUNDING FOOTBALL BY A DIFFERENT MEANS

"The supporter ownership model is leading the way.."

Contributed By:
John Paul Clifford

There are many facets to football that are known to supporters of the modern game, especially in this information age with social media, websites, radio and television. With the exponential growth in the game across the continent, quality, quantity and information has grown to unprecedented levels. However, so too has debt.

We are currently seeing clubs scrambling to avoid crises after crises, with supporters leading the battle for survival time and time again. However, not only are fans losing the teams they adore - jobs are being lost, debts are going unpaid to local businesses and voids - where once people were brought together in a positive manner - are being formed.

The massive rise in transfer fees and wages across the continent at the top levels has not improved the overall game. Those with significant television deals may benefit, but the rest are left to fight amongst themselves for any smaller deals that may come their way. A recent European Commission report focusing on the professional sport transfer market proved that to be case.

Sean Kelly, MEP for the South constituency for Ireland, spoke on behalf of European Parliament's committee on Culture and Education which includes sport, commented: "The figures are striking. €3 billion is spent every year on transfers in professional football in Europe, with only approximately 3% of that or €60 million filtering down towards the smaller and amateur clubs for the development of the sport and talent for the future.

"The proposal being floated is to have a 'fair play levy' on these exorbitant transfer fees which would help smaller clubs and grassroots threefold: compensating them for the costs of training and educating young players, funding development of sport at community and grassroots level, as well as helping clubs to compete on a more level playing field.¹"

The 'trickle down' economics of the massive increase in sports revenue shows that finances are not filtering down through to the lower levels and grassroots clubs, who often provide the initial starting point and footballing education for the future 'superstars' of the game. This 'fair play levy' would at least help bridge the gap considerably and allow smaller clubs to improve their facilities, equipment and standards as well as clear debts.

This issue also raises a fundamental question - if 97% of transfer fees don't 'trickle down', where does it go? Many of the top clubs across Europe have to serve a variety of masters including investors, owner's profits, operating costs, debts, high wages, dividends and a focus on the stock market. A decent chunk of the funds may also be repatriated to areas outside of where the club itself operates.

This is one of the reasons why fan ownership offers a fantastic alternative. Risks, financial or otherwise, are less likely when something of personal interest is at stake. Take off their jerseys and supporters are professionals, with years of experience and extensive skill sets to call on.

Supporters also generally pay a subscription to become a

shareholder or member of the club, income that generates a nest egg and provides long-term security for any unforeseen situations that may lie ahead.

This same pot of money can also be used to improve the club and its infrastructure, reduce debt or to support social projects that will help both the club and local community. Likewise, fans are unlikely to focus on dividends, returns, benefits, expenses and massive profits - all of which means that the money generated within the club is likely to remain there. This, in turn, creates further economic and social benefits to local community.

Clubs that have fans at the heart of their ownership structure additionally allow for instant feedback and can act to implement new ideas quickly, given their unique understanding of their fans' point of view. It is also logical for supporters to have a significant input into the running of their club; after all, these clubs are a business and any good business must look at its market and how that same market feels about various different issues. This, in turn, creates goodwill, loyalty, accountability and long-term financial backing (in the form of membership fees), all of which the club can rely on to create a financial safety net or 'rainy day' fund. This stability is also in contrast to the financial backing gained from privately owned groups, who can - and have - pulled the plug on investment as soon as it becomes clear that a return maybe unlikely.

In recent years, many League of Ireland clubs have faced several financial situations. Some have unfortunately met their demise, whilst others have become supporters-owned clubs.

Cork City FC, Sligo Rovers and Shamrock Rovers are just a few that have supporters groups at the heart of the decision making, in sharp contrast to a time not so long ago where massive unsustainable losses surrounded the league as a whole.

In 2007, the collective losses of the league were €6.9 million. In 2012, the league – according to Director of the League, Fran Gavin, recorded a collective profit of €241,000.² Some of this may include prize money received by Shamrock Rovers following their very successful 2011 Europa League run; either way, the league would seem to have generally stabilised as clubs run their operations more prudently.

The days of relying on outside investment based on unsustainable spending and lack of sound structures are gone. Clubs have focused on financial planning, developing structures, links with the community and underage teams, and this has resulted in more financial stability - with supporter involvement in the decision making process at many of those same clubs.

The feeling that a supporter can have a say in the running and direction of his or her club is hugely encouraging and will keep them involved for life. Clubs and

supporters rowing together in the right direction will lead to healthier clubs and a healthier league in time – and the supporter ownership model is leading the way in this regard.

INCOME STATISTICS :

- Broadcast rights have increased by an average of 8.2% across Europe over the past five years, according to Uefa's European Club Licensing benchmarking report³. TV money in the League of Ireland is included in the prize money for various competitions. The prize fund for the League was not increased for the 2013 season⁴ and is down significantly on 2010 levels⁵.
- Uefa Club competition income (i.e. prize money) made up between 30-50% of the total revenue received by Irish clubs participating in European fixtures during the financial year 2011⁶.
- Nearly half of all top division clubs in Europe (48%) attract an average of less than 3,000 spectators to their games, according to The European Club Licensing Benchmarking report (FY 2011)⁷.
- According to The European Club Licensing Benchmarking report (FY 2011), estimated revenue streams for Irish clubs are as follows: broadcasting (2-3%), Uefa prize money (20%), gate receipts (25-30%), sponsorship (15-20%) and Commercial/Other (25-30%)⁸. *Figures including Rovers European run.

1. <http://www.southernstar.ie/Sport/EU-blows-whistle-on-inflated-transfer-fees-and-strikes-for-level-playing-field-11022013.htm> (as seen on 18/02/2013)

2. FAI website. Clubs in profit as Airtricity League 2013 season is launched. (01/03/2013) <http://www.fai.ie/domestic-a-grassroots/airtricity-league/news/103076-clubs-in-profit-as-airtricity-lleague-2013-season-is-launched.html>

3. The European Club Licensing Benchmarking Report (Financial Year 2011). Available online: http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/Tech/uefaorg/General/01/91/61/84/1916184_DOWNLOAD.pdf. Page 13

4. FAI website. Clubs in profit as Airtricity League 2013 season is launched (01/03/2013) <http://www.fai.ie/domestic-a-grassroots/airtricity-league/news/103076-clubs-in-profit-as-airtricity-lleague-2013-season-is-launched.html>

5. Irish Independent website. Clubs left facing huge shortfall as FAI slash League prize money (12/02/2011). <http://www.independent.ie/sport/soccer/league-of-ireland/546500-fai-slash-league-prize-money-26694874.html>

6. The European Club Licensing Benchmarking Report (Financial Year 2011). Available online: http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/Tech/uefaorg/General/01/91/61/84/1916184_DOWNLOAD.pdf. Page 43

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8. The European Club Licensing Benchmarking Report (Financial Year 2011). Available online: http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/Tech/uefaorg/General/01/91/61/84/1916184_DOWNLOAD.pdf. Page 89



7.1 - OUTCOMES FROM THE IMPROVING FOOTBALL GOVERNANCE PROJECT

"In Ireland you're just getting on with it. It's truly inspiring"

CONCLUSION

The challenges facing Irish football clubs today are varied and not insignificant in number but - regardless of their size or ownership structure - one need that has clearly emerged during the Improving Football Governance project in Ireland is the necessity for supporters to take up a more meaningful and organised position within the game at all levels.

As volunteers, staff, customers, investors and owners, supporters have earned the right to have their views heard at the highest levels of the game in Ireland. Fans are passionate and ardent backers of their football clubs, but they are also experienced and skilled professionals in their own right and have a huge contribution to make to ensure that the League of Ireland begins to fulfill its potential in future years.

OUTCOMES

The project had had three specific outcomes from day one: a fans survey, a project workshop and a handbook for each partner country. The survey was conducted over a number of weeks in the Autumn of 2012, while the Heart of the Game conference was held in Cork last November.

A summary of both can be requested by emailing:

> info@heartofthegame.ie

The most intensive piece of work by far, however, has been the planning, researching, writing and editing of the Heart of the Game handbook - for which clubs, Trusts, groups and individual supporters across the island have made contributions. The priority was to gather best practice from within the League and supplement it with relevant case studies and practical advice where possible.

The project's working group also set out a number of additional objectives of its own with input from Supporters Direct Europe. The handbook tracks the history of the Supporters' Trust movement in Ireland, but the project has also been tasked with understanding where supporter involvement and community ownership is heading in this country and what supports would aid its development.

Key to this will be the establishment of an informal network of supporters-run clubs and groups that will aim to share advice and experience as well as give assistance where requested.

Promotion of Fan Ownership and raising awareness of the growing

number of supporters-run clubs in the League of Ireland - and the benefits those same clubs have started to bring to Irish football as a whole - is another piece of work taken on by the working group. This has taken place at local, national and European level and these particular efforts have been aided by representatives of clubs, Trusts and groups around Ireland.

Finally, the project has also raised awareness of League of Ireland football - in particular the very real impact that supporters are having here day in day out - amongst our project partners, Supporters Direct Europe, the European Commission, UEFA and across the entire network of supporter-run clubs and Trusts all over Europe.

"Everywhere I travel in Europe, I meet sceptics; people who don't think the idea of fan involvement or ownership will work at their club, in their region, or in their country. In Ireland you're just getting on with it. It's truly inspiring." - Kevin Rye, Supporters Direct

7.2 - RESOURCES

"There exists a contact database of fans"

ESTABLISHMENT OF WEB PRESENCE

Having an independent web presence will be crucial in disseminating information quickly and easily. In addition to the expanding the range of information on supporter involvement from Supporters Direct Europe, the site can also be used to provide commentary on issues within Irish football that affect fans.

> <http://www.heartofthegame.ie>

SUPPORTERS DIRECT RESOURCES

A huge wealth of information on Supporters' Trusts and various issues around supporter involvement in football is available online on the SD website:

> <http://www.supporters-direct.org/members-zone/handbook>

IRISH NETWORK: FORMATION OF INITIAL WORKING GROUP AND SKILLS AUDIT

In order to enable skills sharing and communications, a working group of individuals should be formed to manage the initial set up of the network. The working group should ideally consist of activists from supporter-owned clubs and the wider Irish Trust movement.

A CONTACTS DATABASE

Arising from both the workshop and the survey related to this project, there exists a contact database of fans interested in the next steps around the many issues the work, discussion and research has raised. This list should continue to be provided with news and information on developments from the network.

CONTACT US

> info@heartofthegame.ie



Image: Eric Barry

8.1 - ADDITIONAL COMPANY STRUCTURES

“Additional company structures.. are briefly set out below”

CHAPTER 2: LEGAL: ADDITIONAL COMPANY STRUCTURES

The general term of ‘a company’ encapsulates a number of different forms of organisations. The differentiation is usually based on the extent of the separation of the legal personae and liability of the Company than that of its shareholders. The Company is the appropriate person to be sued in the event that the Company incurs debts it is unwilling or unable to pay and is a distinct legal person (as opposed to it being a natural person) than those who own or run it.

The various types are briefly set out below:

LIMITED COMPANY:

The shares of the company are owned by shareholders. If a limited liability company should be wound up, then the liability of the shareholders is limited to whichever type of limited company they are a member of. There are four types of limited companies

PRIVATE COMPANY LIMITED BY SHARES:

Members’ liability limited to the remaining unpaid on the shares held by them. Maximum membership is 50 members.

COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL:

Members Liability limited to the amount they undertook to contribute to the assets of the company should it be wound up. Similar to a cooperative there must be a minimum of 7 members and many charitable and professional bodies are registered as such in order to ensure separate legal personality and benefit from limited liability without having to raise funds.

COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL:

This has more in similar with 1 above than 2, despite the name. Membership is limited to 50 members and they have liability in the amount that is unpaid on shares they hold and the amount they have undertaken to contribute to the company should it be wound up.

PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY:

It is a limited (liability) company whose shares are freely sold and traded to the public, with a minimum share capital of €38,092.14 and the letters PLC after its name. Not likely to be used in the Irish Football context going forward because of the high capital requirement.

INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETY:

(discussed in detail in Chapter 2)

Other legal forms include Single Member firms, Unlimited Companies and Partnership however they tend either not to be appropriate in the context of football clubs or simply not allowed due to club licensing considerations.



Image: Peadar O' Sullivan

8.2 - THE IRISH COURTS AND SUPPORTER'S RESCUES

"Examinership was not enough to override examinership in the community"

BRANVARD LTD T/A SHAMROCK ROVERS

UNREPORTED HIGH COURT 12 APRIL 2005

KELLY J

Debts owing to the Revenue of €2.3 Million. Revenue Commissioners made up 1/5 of that.

Creditors meeting called. Agreement put in place of a dividend of 2c in every euro to be paid to creditors.

Judge Kelly in the High initially rejected the application based on a lack of representation from the Revenue Commissioners and a lack of clarity based on where the team would play for the forthcoming season.

Some mention of the role in the Community but no specific basis of the decision upon that. There was a consideration that the dividend which was to be paid to creditors was the lowest ever seen by a Court.

CORK CITY FC INVESTMENT LIMITED T/A CORK CITY FC

UNREPORTED HIGH COURT 16 OCTOBER 2008

KELLY J

Debts of €1.3 Million. Again Revenue commissioners a major creditor. Very difficult financial situation. Examiner sold a player to an English football club in order to bring in the money to pay for the examinership process.

Creditors meeting called. Most creditors accepted a dividend of 7.5 % of what they were owed. The

Revenue Commissioner, despite being offered 15% due to their position as preferential creditors objected strongly to the scheme.

Mr. Justice Peter Kelly referred in particular to a letter he received from a Cork City Supporter and Primary school teacher concerning Cork City FC's role in the community; "I was introduced to Cork City in 2004 and my life has been changed immeasurably by it. However, I do not write to you to speak of my passion for the club. I write as a primary school teacher who has seen what Cork City can give to the community. "On our streets are children full of energy, passion and creativity but with nowhere to direct this in a positive manner. This club gives our community a focus and an outlet. "To the kids I teach, professional football seemed out of their reach. Yet, when the Cork City players brought the FAI Cup to the school last year, this perception changed. These players were people like them, from Cork or Limerick or Kerry. My school is in a designated disadvantaged area. These children have tough lives, but they are just children, full of energy but with nowhere to direct it. At these games, they're just children again, enjoying every minute. "Cork City FC is not just a business, it is an integral part of our community, one with enormous potential to help educate the youth of today if given the chance to do so properly. Please give us this chance."

On the basis of the important role played by the club in the community Mr Justice Kelly decided to sanction the scheme of arrangement as presented to the Court despite the strong objections of the Revenue Commissioners. Whilst he also concluded that there was a reasonable prospect of

survival he did note that particular weight was being attached to the Community element. Cork City Investments FC Limited was subsequently placed into liquidation by the High Court.

A similar judgment followed for Drogheda United FC (High Court Unreported 15 December 2008) which entered into Examinership.

The Importance of the Community role had thus far been confined to football clubs however in Re Traffic Group Ltd 2008 3 IR 253. Traffic was a clothing brand which had traded successfully in Dublin for a number of years however it eventually encountered financial trouble and petitioned for examinership. Here it was held that "It is clear that the principal focus of the legislation is to enable in an appropriate case, an enterprise to continue in existence for the benefit of the economy as a whole and, of equal, or indeed greater, importance to enable as many as possible of the jobs which may be at stake in such enterprise to be maintained for the benefit of the community in which the relevant employment is located. It is important both for the court and, indeed, for examiners, to keep in mind that such is the focus of the legislation."

In that case even the fact that the petitioners had not fully disclosed the full nature of a charge in favour of a bank and the fact that certain creditors would do worse out of Examinership was not enough to override the idea of examinership in the community.

8.3 - FANS SURVEY FINDINGS

THE FOLLOWING IS A SELECTION OF FINDINGS FROM THE FANS SURVEY. IN TOTAL THERE WERE 32 QUESTIONS, WHICH AMOUNT TO A 19 PAGE DOCUMENT OUTLINING THE VIEWS OF FANS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY. FOR THE FULL SURVEY RESULTS, EMAIL:

> INFO@HEARTOFTHEGAME.IE

Q13. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE RUNNING OF FOOTBALL IN YOUR COUNTRY GENERALLY?

13. How satisfied are you with the running of football IN YOUR COUNTRY generally? (Please rate from 1 (Very satisfied) to 5 (Very unsatisfied).)		
	answered question	1,385
	skipped question	124
	Response Percent	Response Count
1 (Very satisfied)	1.4%	19
2 (Satisfied)	2.7%	37
3 (Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied)	5.8%	80
4 (Unsatisfied)	28.9%	400
5 (Very unsatisfied)	60.4%	837
Don't know / Not Applicable	0.9%	12

Q14. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE RUNNING OF FOOTBALL IN YOUR CLUB?

14. How satisfied are you with the running of football AT YOUR CLUB? (Please rate from 1 (Very satisfied) to 5 (Very unsatisfied).)		
	answered question	1,385
	skipped question	124
	Response Percent	Response Count
1 (Very satisfied)	22.5%	312
2 (Satisfied)	51.1%	708
3 (Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied)	13.6%	189
4 (Unsatisfied)	8.3%	115
5 (Very unsatisfied)	3.7%	51
Don't know / Not Applicable	0.7%	10

Q16. ON A SCALE OF 1-5 PLEASE SAY WHETHER YOU THINK GREATER SUPPORTER OWNERSHIP OR INVOLVEMENT WOULD IMPROVE THE RUNNING OF YOUR CLUB?

16. On a scale of 1-5 please say whether you think greater <i>supporter ownership</i> or <i>involvement</i> would improve the running of your club? (Please tick one option below.)		
	answered question	1,330
	skipped question	179
	Response Percent	Response Count
1 (It will improve it a lot)	38.9%	517
2	22.4%	298
3	14.2%	189
4	3.0%	40
5 (It won't improve it at all.)	3.1%	41
'Don't know' / Not Applicable	18.4%	245

Q17. ON A SCALE OF 1-5 PLEASE SAY WHETHER YOU THINK GREATER SUPPORTER OWNERSHIP OR INVOLVEMENT WOULD IMPROVE THE RUNNING OF FOOTBALL IN YOUR CLUB GENERALLY?

17. On a scale of 1-5 please say whether you think greater <i>supporter involvement</i> would improve the running of football in your country generally? (Please tick one option below.)		
	answered question	1,330
	skipped question	179
	Response Percent	Response Count
1 (It will improve it a lot)	52.4%	697
2	22.9%	304
3	12.6%	168
4	4.2%	56
5 (It won't improve it at all.)	4.4%	59
'Don't know' / Not Applicable	3.5%	46

Q20. WOULD YOU JOIN A SUPPORTERS' ORGANISATION THAT HAD THE AIM OF GETTING/MAINTAINING AN OWNERSHIP STAKE AT YOUR CLUB?

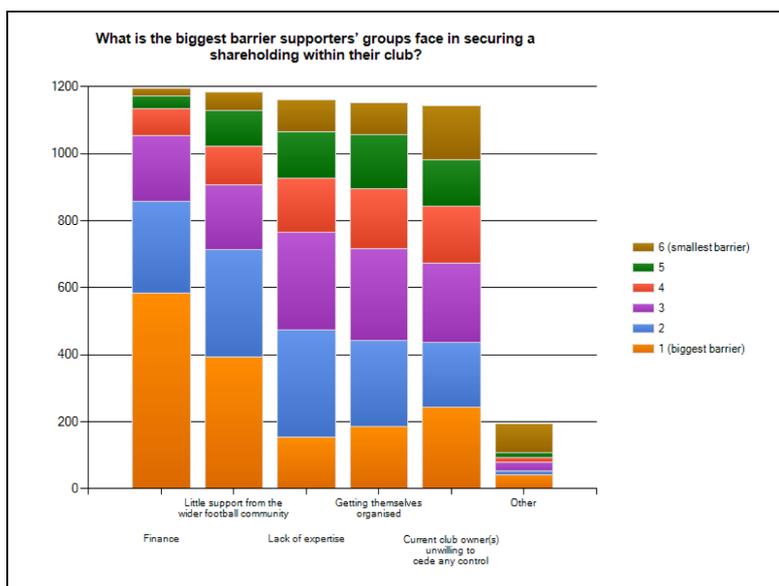
20. Would you join a supporters' organisation that had the aim of getting/maintaining an ownership stake at your club?		
	answered question	1,326
	skipped question	183
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	42.4%	562
No	9.8%	130
I am already a member of one	30.2%	400
Don't know	17.6%	234

Q20. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AN ORGANISATION OR ASSISTANCE ESTABLISHED THAT WOULD ALLOW LEAGUE OF IRELAND SUPPORTERS HAVING MEANINGFUL INPUT INTO ISSUES AFFECTING THE AIRTRICITY LEAGUE?

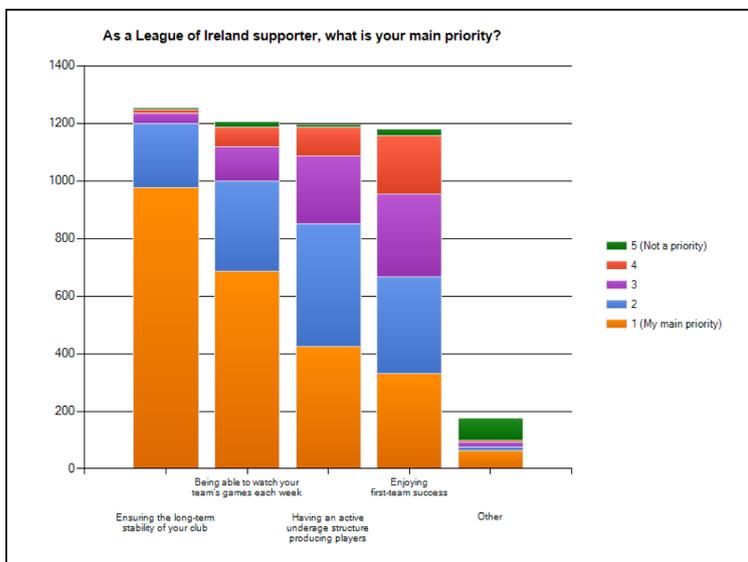
Q26. Would you like to see an organisation or assistance established that would allow League of Ireland supporters having meaningful input into issues affecting the Airtricity League?

- Yes: 97.4% (1,259)
- No: 2.6% (33)

Q27. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST BARRIER SUPPORTERS' GROUPS FACE IN SECURING A SHAREHOLDING WITHIN THEIR CLUB?



Q28. AS A LEAGUE OF IRELAND SUPPORTER, WHAT IS YOUR MAIN PRIORITY?



8.4 - CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

NIAMH O'MAHONY

Niamh is Project Manager of the Improving Football Governance project. As a former board member of Cork City FC and secretary of FORAS, she has been invited to speak about the experiences of her home town Supporters' Trust and football club at numerous events as well as at three of the project's workshops – in Spain, Sweden and Belgium. Niamh is also involved in ongoing Supporters Direct case work within the League of Ireland.

SHANE TOBIN

Lifelong Cork City fan and member of FORAS, Shane was appointed researcher to the Improving Football Governance project in 2012 and is currently a final year Social Science student in UCC.

LEE DALY

Lee Daly is the acting Chairperson of the 1895 Trust, the Supporters' Trust for Shelbourne FC fans. He has also written on football for When Saturday Comes, The Score and In Bed With Maradona and works as a digital marketing consultant in Dublin.

DAVID TOMS

David Toms is currently completing a PhD in the School of History, UCC where he holds a Tutorial Scholarship. His historical research has previously been published in Sport in History, with further research forthcoming in Irish Economic and Social History and The Blizzard. A contributor to David Convery (ed.) Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working-Class Life, he blogs regularly both The True Ball and The Dustbin of History online.

SEÁN Ó CONAILL

Seán Ó Conaill BCL, LL.M is a Lecturer in Sports Law and Corporate Insolvency Law at the Faculty of Law at University College Cork. Seán has served as a board member and legal officer for Cork City FC and FORAS. He had involvement in the original formation of FORAS, the supporter takeover in 2010 and dealings with the liquidator of the former holding company. Seán has also been appointed to the panel of independent legal chairs for the FAI Disciplinary Hearing Board and has published research and presented papers at international conferences on the interaction between Irish insolvency law and football clubs.

SHANE O'CONNOR

Shane O'Connor is originally from Turners Cross in Cork and now works as a solicitor in Dublin city.

SIMON BAILY

Simon Baily is an experienced EU Affairs and external funding professional. He is the Head of the Ireland Wales Programme and has been involved in the development of almost 300 partnership projects between Ireland and Wales since 2002, worth more than €120 million. He previously worked in public affairs for the chemical industry in Brussels. He is a lifelong Cork City supporter and FORAS member.

ÉANNA BUCKLEY

Éanna Buckley has been working for Cork City FC since 2006. Currently Club Administrator, his role encompasses that of the club's Media Officer, Licensing Officer, Programme Editor and Travel Coordinator amongst other administration responsibilities. Éanna has also been awarded the Soccer Writers Association of Ireland (SWAI) Press Officer of the Year award on three occasions, most recently in 2012.

JOSEPH MCSWEENEY

Joseph McSweeney is a working professional based in county Cork as well as a musician with Cork-based group The Black Stalks. He is an active member of FORAS and has been a volunteer for Cork City FC for several years across various capacities - from selling and taking tickets, stewarding and arranging items for the club shop. His present role within the club is as the Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO).

NIALL O'SULLIVAN

Niall has been a Cork City FC supporter since going along to watch Djurgardens IF at Turner's Cross in the UEFA Cup in 2005. He currently maintains order on the wheelchair ramp on alternate home Cork City games. During daylight hours he works as an instrument technician at University College Cork and, after dark, has squeezed a BSc out of the Open University and a Diploma in Philosophy from UCC.

JOHN O'SULLIVAN

John O'Sullivan is CEO of Limerick FC. He was a founding member of the FORAS Supporters' Trust and served as Chairman from 2009-2012. Following FORAS's takeover of Cork City FC in 2010, he held the role of Club Chairman through the club's promotion to the Premier Division at the end of the 2011 season. John has also worked as CEO of Athlone Town, is a club representative to the FAI and sits on the 'Limerick 2014 City of Culture' Sports Pillar Group; he is regularly sought to advise groups and organisations on sports business.

ROBBIE BUTLER

Robbie Butler is a lecturer in the School of Economics, University College Cork and has written extensively in the national media on sports economics. Recently, Robbie has had work published by the Sunday Independent, Irish Independent and Irish Examiner. He has presented sports economics papers at the Irish Society of New Economist Conference in 2009, 2010 and 2012, the Irish Economic Association Conference in 2011, and was invited to speak at the 3rd The Biennial International Conference in the Economics and Psychology of Football at the University of London in May 2010. Robbie is currently supervising a postgraduate thesis on the medium-term goals of Waterford United Football Club. From a football perspective, Robbie has a FAI Junior Cup winner's medal, a Cork Munster Senior Cup winner's medal and represented Ireland at Amateur International level.

JOHN PAUL CLIFFORD

John Paul Clifford is a member of FORAS and a Cork City FC supporter. He is currently finishing a BA in Financial Economics and Politics in University College Cork. As someone with a huge interest in domestic football, he saw the project as a fantastic opportunity to combine College studies with sporting interests. John Paul is also interested in developing small businesses.

PAT HEALY

Born and bred in Cork into a mad football family, Pat's uncle played League Of Ireland with Cork Athletic in the 50s while his father's claim to fame was that he once played in Milan's San Siro! Pat experienced his first League of Ireland game in Flower Lodge Cork in the late 60s and he's been hooked ever since. He is currently on the board of both Cork City FC and Cork Womens FC and is a keen photographer in his spare time.

IAN ANDERSON

Ian is a freelance photographer who recently started covering the Women's National League but also photographs the League of Ireland and Ireland's senior international fixtures.

ERIC BARRY

Eric is a lifelong Cork City fan and supplies the club with regular photography from home and away fixtures.

BILLY GALLIGAN

Billy aka A Man With His Camera is first and foremost a St Patrick's Athletic fan but also a part time Photographer and full-time media student. 25 years in the Defence Forces gives him a broad range of experience but photographing St Pat's matches is his passion. More photos on www.amanwithhiscamera.com

TONY TOBIN

Tony is a former Cork Hibs supporter and current Cork City supporter since 1984. He has fond memories of volunteering in Bishopstown during the days of the likes of Galatasaray coming to town. Tony is also a proud member of FORAS and contributor of photographs to the official website of Cork City FC.

PEADAR O'SULLIVAN

Once Peadar accepted that he was never going to play for Cork City FC, he set about doing the next best thing - photographing his football club. In 2000, he was invited to submit photographs to the match programme and his involvement has grown from there. When Cork City FC was taken over by its fans, volunteers became crucial to progression of the club. As a member of the Supporters' Trust, Peadar played his part - contributing images to the club, particularly from away games.

DAVID CALDWELL

David is a lifelong supporter of Dundalk FC and has been a member of the Dundalk FC Community Trust since 2009. He is also the club's official photographer and has worked as a groundsman at Oriel Park.

MAURICE FRAZER

A third generation Shelbourne supporter, Maurice took up photographing the club during the dark days of 2007 as no other media were interested in covering the 1st division.

SHANE TWOMEY

An avid Cork City FC fan since the late 90's, Shane is the graphic designer on this project. His passion lies in the creation of various forms of media from graphic and web design, to photography and video production, under the guise of Cork based company Zenith Media Productions.



“I am very encouraged to see football supporters coming together like this for the first time to develop ways of addressing the long-term challenges facing football in Ireland.”

- President Michael D Higgins