

Wales and Ireland announce community football partnership ahead of crunch World Cup qualifier

More than €1m of EU funding is being invested in a partnership between the Football Association of Ireland and the Welsh sports organisation Vi-Ability to capitalise on the popularity of football, by turning local clubs into social enterprises that deliver a range of sport-based life science and educational programmes.

The 'More than a Club' initiative will be piloted over the next two years at four clubs in Wales and Ireland, with Haverfordwest County, Cork City and Dublin-based Bohemian FC already signed up.

The project is supported by the Ireland Wales 2014-2020 European Territorial Co-operation Programme, which is helping to strengthen collaboration between Ireland and Wales, to address common economic and social challenges.

Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government Mark Drakeford said:

"This is a very creative approach to improving health and wellbeing in local communities, and the project will benefit hugely from the ideas, expertise and resources that will be shared across the Irish Sea.'

"The Ireland-Wales co-operation programme is a vital platform for collaboration that is bringing investment into our economy and creating opportunities for our businesses, universities and specialist organisations to work together. I'm delighted that €1m of EU funds will be supporting another exciting collaboration between our nations."

The Irish Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe T.D., said:

"The 'More than a Club' project is an example of the benefits of ongoing partnership under the Ireland Wales Programme. EU funding will allow this project to combine the expertise of organisations in the two nations to engage young people in social enterprise through football.'

"The positive impact of continued cooperation under the Ireland Wales Programme is strongly supported by the Irish government and we remain committed to its successful implementation."

Through the project, participating clubs will deliver community-focused programmes to help improve the physical and mental health of people of all ages, alternative learning opportunities for children, and other social programmes aimed at improving the quality of people's lives locally.

FAI Project Manager, Derek O'Neill, said:

"For millions of people, football is a hugely attractive sport to play, to watch and to talk about, but it can also be a powerful vehicle to promote physical health, personal development, community development and general well-being."

"The FAI and Vi-Ability are delighted to have secured EU funding to help expand the role and potential of football in the community, and we're looking forward to working together to exchange ideas, share resources and expertise and develop a flagship model which other football clubs in both nations can seek to emulate."